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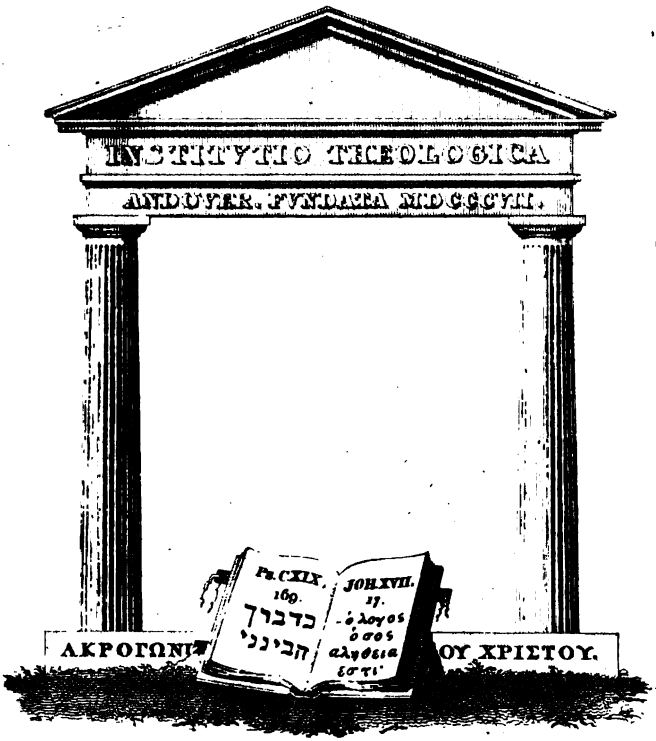
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SERMONS

ON THE

PARABLES.

BY

JOHN FARRER, M. A.

London:

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1801.

THE PREFACE.

THE Parables of our blessed Lord have been always understood to comprehend a very copious fund of divine and spiritual truth. And therefore they have been repeatedly chosen in different ages and countries for arguments both of doctrinal and practical discourse. So frequently discussed as they have already been, it would be a vain attempt at this day to seek after novelty whether of illustration or improvement. The whole that can now be done to any useful purpose, and what has been attempted in the present undertaking, is to place the Parables in the clearest and the most instructive point of view.

The Introductory part of this Work consists of Three Discourses on Parable in general. Therein are examined the Characters and Uses of Parable, the Principle of Interpretation, the professed Design of Christ in employing this figurative kind of speech, and the Application of his Parables both immediately to his Hearers and by inference to all.

The Main Body of the Work consists of a Series of Discourses on particular Parables; which the Author has conducted on an uniform and comprehensive plan. He has endeavoured through the whole to distribute his argument under the following heads:

First, To enquire into the Occasion on which the Parable was spoken, and the Dispositions of the People to whom it was addressed. On this he has laid

a more than ordinary stress, because he regards it as the most unquestionable basis of a correct Interpretation. In the course of this inquiry he has sometimes found opportunities to illustrate some of the shorter Parables, which did not seem to need a separate consideration.

Secondly, To state the Parable in its Literal Sense, to explain the circumstances of the Narrative which bear an allusion to the manners, customs, and opinions of the Jews in our Saviour's days, and, where occasion offers, to enlarge upon it.

Thirdly, To explore the Figurative or Spiritual Sense, and to expound it in its immediate reference to our Saviour's Hearers, and to the special circumstances under which it was spoken.

And lastly, To give it a General Application, as a Lesson both of Doctrine and of Practice to the whole Christian World.

As some of the Parables have a close resemblance in their Narrative, as also a near connexion in their Moral, it is not easy to conduct a continued Series of Discourses upon them without occasional recurrences of sentiment and expression. Repetitions of this nature might have passed unnoticed in Sermons delivered separately from the pulpit, though probably they are too conspicuous in their present form. For a defect, which is in some degree attached to the nature of his work, the Author hopes for the candid indulgence of his Readers.

Through all these Discourses he has endeavoured to attain these two principal

cipal objects of preaching, to explain the holy Scriptures to the Understanding, and to apply them to the Heart and Life. With this intent they have been addressed to Parish Congregations from the Pulpit*, and they are now presented in a fuller form to the notice of the Public.

Should this Volume be favourably received, it may be followed in convenient season by a Second, which will complete the whole design.

Reading, January 1, 1801.

* Some few of these Sermons have been also preached before the University of Oxford.

CORRECTIONS.

P. 28, l. 18, read grievances.
P. 38, l. 19, ... *some* under.
P. 62, note, ... [k] Psalm xvii. 15.

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SERMON I.

THE PROPERTIES OF PARABLE.

MATTHEW XIII. 34.

All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables: and without a parable spake he not unto them.

THE customary method of our Saviour's preaching to the common people, as the Evangelist reports, was by similitude or parable. In this respect his language was agreeable to the prophetic intimation given in the book of Psalms; *I will open my mouth in parables: I will utter things, which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world*[a]. These words indeed in their original sense represent that stile of lan-

SERM. I.

[a] Psalm lxxviii. 2.

SERM. I. guage, in which the Psalmist was about to treat of God's providential dealings under the economy of the Law: but as adopted on this occasion by the Evangelist, they with equal fitness of application represent that mode of speech, in which our holy teacher Jesus Christ was accustomed to discourse of God's more gracious dispensations under the economy of the Gospel. He chose the language of similitude to convey those doctrines of divine grace, emphatically stiled *the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven*, which had hitherto been concealed from the knowledge of mankind since the creation of the universe.

Now this account implies, that his parables contain a fund of religious truth, important and beneficial in a high degree, yet not so plain and obvious, as to be fully comprehended without some patient and diligent research.

In order to facilitate and improve this research, I propose to treat upon the parables in a series of discourses. And that the way may be opened for a clearer investigation of parable, I shall employ my first discourse, to delineate its Characters, to display its Uses, and

to point out some principle of a right Interpretation. SERM. I.

I. I AM first to consider the characters of parable. Now this appellation has a very comprehensive meaning in the Scriptures of the Old Testament: being used in general to characterize the sacred poetry of the Hebrews; and being in particular applied to these three modes of speech, the sententious, the figurative, and the sublime[b]. But from the more appropriate usage of the Gospel the term is restricted to that kind of similitude, so common in the discourses of Jesus Christ, in which by natural and sensible images are represented moral and spiritual truths.

Now parable thus understood was a favourite vehicle of instruction among all nations from the remotest ages of antiquity. It was adopted by the poets, the philosophers, and the orators both of Greece and Rome. It was yet more copiously employed by the sages of the East. And while cultivated much among the Heathens, it was at least in

[b] See Lowth's Prelections on the sacred Poetry of the Hebrews. Prelec. iv.

SERM. I. equal request among the Jews: for we find it frequently assumed through the Old Testament by the Statesman, the Psalmist, and the Prophet, in their several functions and capacities.

In still more abundant measure was it employed by the author of our holy faith. Were we to enumerate under this description all those images from material objects, which our Saviour uses under the several forms of metaphor, comparison, and allusion, it may truly be affirmed that he continually spoke in parable.

To take some examples from the Sermon on the Mount: He calls his disciples *the salt of the earth:* for as it is the property of salt to purify and preserve any corporal substance, so it was their office to purify and preserve the soul. He calls them *the light of the world:* for as it is the property of the heavenly bodies to illuminate the face of nature, so it was their function to illuminate the minds of men. He compares them to *a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid:* being placed in a distinguished point of view as the teachers of a new religion, they were exposed to the public notice of the world; and there-

therefore it was incumbent on them to *let their light shine before men* [c]. SERM. I.

All these kinds of images may be considered under the name of parable: and thus they are sometimes mentioned in the Gospel. But the term in its ordinary sense is confined to those similitudes, which come under the fuller form of a continued narrative. This kind of similitude he did not professedly employ, till the time, when he preached from a ship on the coast of the sea of Galilee to the multitude who stood on the shore. And from this time it is observable that he constantly employed this method of instruction, whenever he discoursed to a mixed assembly of hearers. *All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables: and without a parable spake he not unto them.*

Our Saviour's parables have this common character, that they are closely adapted to the senses or faculties of those who heard them.

1. For in the first place, they are drawn from the more familiar scenes of nature, and commonly from such as might be then in view. Thus when he de-

[c] Matt. v. 13, &c.

SERM. I. livered his Sermon on the Mount, it appears to have been the season of spring, when the extensive scenery before him was full of cheerfulness and harmony and verdure. Hence he addresses his allusions to the present observation of those who stood around him. To repress all inordinate anxiety for the necessaries of life, and to recommend a pious trust in the providential care of Heaven, he refers them for a lesson to the animal and the vegetable world. Were they fretfully solicitous what they should eat or what they should drink, *Behold*, says he, *the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?* Or did they take an immoderate thought for raiment, *Consider*, says he, *the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith*[d]*?*

[d] Matt. vi. 25, &c.

2. They

2. They are drawn from the common relations of human life. To impress upon his hearers this important truth, that for their conduct here they will be called to an account hereafter, he frequently represents the Lord of all the earth under the similitude of a master of a household, who appoints his servants their respective tasks, and after a long time calls upon them to give an account of their respective performances; When according to impartial justice he commends and rewards his good and faithful servants, and condemns and punishes the faithless and unprofitable[e]. And again, to encourage all those, who have hitherto been deficient in their duty, or have wandered into the ways of irreligion, that they redeem the time, and return into the ways of righteousness, he also represents the Creator of the world under the similitude of a father, who is gracious and kind to all his children, and especially is merciful to the prodigal, when he repents of his errors and confesses his unworthiness[f].

SERM. I.

[e] Matt. xxiv. 45, &c. xxv. 14, &c. Luke xii. 42, &c. xix. 11, &c.

[f] Luke xv. 11, &c.

SERM. I.

3. They are drawn from the common occupations of men. As his audience usually consisted of the poorer and less enlightened orders of mankind, he seems to have purposely chosen to bring instruction home, not only to their capacities, but also to their experience. When speaking to a multitude of rural auditors, his similitudes are usually taken from the employments of rural life. Thus he repeatedly speaks of a sower going forth to sow, of a shepherd looking after his flock, of a householder planting and disposing of his vineyard [g].

And that he may adapt his discourse still more closely to the experience of all his hearers, he sometimes repeats the same sentiment under different images. Thus in speaking to a multitude consisting both of men and women, we find the same doctrine represented under two similitudes referring to the different employments of either sex, the one from rural, the other from domestic life. To shew the diffusive increase of his religion in the world, he

[g] Matthew xiii. 3, &c. Luke xv. 4, &c. Matthew xxi. 33, &c.

compares

compares it, first, to a grain of mustard seed, which being sown in a field from the least of seeds becomes the greatest of herbs; and secondly, to a small quantity of leaven, which being put into a large measure of meal diffused its quality through the whole mass[h]. To signify the joy that subsists in heaven on the repentance of a sinner, he represents it, first, under the image of a shepherd calling together his friends and his neighbours to rejoice with him on the recovery of a sheep which had gone astray; and secondly, of a woman calling together her friends and her neighbours to rejoice with her on finding the piece of silver that she had lost[i]. SERM. I.

4. They are sometimes also drawn with an allusion to the peculiar manners, opinions, and civil constitution of the people to whom they are addressed. Thus in the parables of the Pharisee and the Publican[k], and of the Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan[l], a particular reference is made to the distinctions of sect and order, that sub-

[h] Matt. xiii. 31, &c
[i] Luke xv. 4, &c.
[k] Luke xviii. 10, &c.
[l] Luke x. 30, &c.

sisted

SERM. I. sisted at that time in the land of Palestine. In the case of the guest, who came to a marriage feast without a wedding garment, we may perceive an allusion to a custom in the courts of princes and superior men in Eastern countries, of being provided with a store of garments for the use of their guests on any solemn or festal occasion[m]. In the case of the nobleman going into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return, we may also discover an allusion to a practice not unusual in the time of the Roman power, and recently exemplified among the Jews in the case of Herod their king, among the princes and nobles of dependent and tributary states, to repair to Rome, and solicit offices and honours from the superiors of the Roman empire[n].

5. And while the parables in their literal sense are adapted to the temporal habits and occupations of his audience, so also in their figurative sense they have a corresponding reference to their moral dispositions and characters. When our Saviour spoke to a multitude,

[m] Matt. xxii. 11, &c. [n] Luke xix. 12, &c.

who

who listened to his word with various degrees of attention according to their various humours and inclinations, he represents himself under the character of a sower who went forth to sow, when the seed which he sowed fell on different kinds of ground, and failed in various ways, or throve in various degrees, according to the quality of the soil on which it fell [o]. When he spoke to those two opposite descriptions of people, the Publicans and Sinners, who drew near for to hear him, and the Pharisees and Scribes, who murmured at his conduct in receiving sinners and eating with them; he represents the former of these under the character of a younger son, very dissolute on his first going forth, but afterwards very penitent; and the latter under the character of an elder son boasting of his fidelity and diligence in his father's service, and murmuring at the grace which his father shews to a repenting prodigal [p].

SERM. I.

II. I PROCEED in the second place to display the uses of parable.

[o] Matt. xiii. 3, &c. [p] Luke xv. 11, &c.

1. Now

SERM. I.

1. Now the first and original use of it is, that it illustrates moral truth. In this respect it is not only a convenient, but even a necessary vehicle of instruction. The origin of parable in common with most other useful devices was probably from necessity. The teachers of early times, having terms of expression only for material objects, wanted language for the conveyance of intellectual sentiment: hence they were obliged to have recourse for images to the more obvious scenes of nature and of common life.

Now if this resource was found expedient by teachers of human wisdom for the conveyance of simply moral truth; we cannot account it less expedient for a teacher come from God, in order to communicate divine and spiritual truth, since there was a want not only of language to express, but even of ideas to conceive it. It was neither obvious to the senses, nor open to the capacities of human nature. In relation to the spiritual world the wisest of mankind are children, and require to be instructed after the manner of children by such images as are within the compass of their understandings. And there-

therefore in gracious condescension to the weakness of our capacities he has chosen to illustrate our spiritual concerns by temporal similitudes, and to describe the things of God according to the language and sentiments of men. To this we must attribute the complexion of his parables, when he represents the Lord of heaven and earth under the relation of a master, a father, or a prince, when he shadows forth the economy of the Gospel under the similitude of a farm or a vineyard, of a kingdom or a household. SERM. I.

2. A second use of parable, and that very comprehensive and important, is, that it embodies moral truth. As it was begun from necessity, so it was continued for convenience. It would have been of small avail for the teachers of early times to discourse to plain unlettered men in abstract language, of the beauty of virtue and the convenience of moral action. If they were anxious either to take or to retain a hold upon the mind, it was expedient for them to give some form to the virtue they would inculcate and the vice they would reprehend. In order both to engage the attention and impress the memory, they

SERM. I. they found it expedient to embody their instructions in example. And if experience or recollection did not promptly supply them with an apposite instance from civil or domestic life, they had recourse to invention for an imaginary narrative.

In this respect our Saviour's parables have a pre-eminent advantage. By them the attention is engaged, and the memory is impressed: under the semblance of amusement they convey instruction; through the fancy they find a way to the understanding; and by affecting the passions they amend the heart. We may therefore account it a gracious condescension to the dispositions of the human mind, that he has chosen this mode of teaching to give a substance to that spiritual truth which he undertook to communicate.

Of the great use of parable in this point of view one example may suffice. It is one great object of religious instruction to display the fatal consequence of sin and the blessed fruits of repentance. But what is better calculated to produce this effect than the engaging narrative of the younger son[q]?

[q] Luke xv. 11, &c.

Having

Having received his portion of inherit- SERM.
ance, he left his father's house, and I.
went into a far country, and wasted his
substance in riotous living. How just a resemblance of a man once instructed in religious principles, unhappily wandering from the paths of righteousness, and wasting his talents in the gratification of his irregular and criminal desires! Having spent all his portion, he is reduced to the extremities of want, and is obliged for a maintenance to submit to the most miserable and debasing servitude. How expressive a description of an habitual sinner reduced by his unhappy course to a most deplorable state of spiritual indigence, and slavery to the worst of masters! All alive to a sense of his present wretchedness he comes to himself; he laments his follies, he determines to repair to his father's house, to acknowledge his sins, and to commit himself to his clemency. How moving an image of an habitual sinner brought by some affliction to a sense of his unhappy state, repenting of his sins, and resorting to the throne of grace in all humility for pardon! As soon as he approached his paternal home, his father saw him at a distance, he ran to meet

SERM. I. meet him, he received him with every token of affection and forgiveness, he attired him as a son, and welcomed his return with a feast of gratulation. How endearing a picture of the tender compassion of our heavenly Father to a sinner, who repents of his evil course and returns with contrition into the way of righteousness!

3. Another use of parable is, that it gives an agreeable exercise to the understanding, and thereby contributes at the same time to impress any truth more strongly and durably upon the remembrance. The human mind, however weak it may be in exploring truth, yet is never so well satisfied with any attainment which is obvious and easy. The most ignorant and illiterate are better gratified with having a labour to surmount and an intricacy to unravel. And as men put a greater value upon wealth or any other property, which has cost them some diligence to acquire; so they put a greater value upon any moral intelligence, which has exercised the faculties of their mind to comprehend. Hence most of the heathen nations delighted in fables and apologues: and hence among the Jews it

it was always esteemed an intellectual accomplishment *to understand a proverb* or parable *and the interpretation thereof, the words of the wise and their dark sayings.*[r] SERM. I.

In this respect also the parables of Jesus Christ have a very great advantage in engaging the faculties of the human mind. When he delivered his doctrines in person, a particular attention was paid to his parables: the multitude indeed only lent their ears; but his Disciples applied their understandings; and if they were not able to interpret them without assistance, they were anxious to receive an interpretation from his mouth.

And now that his doctrines are transmitted to us in the gospel, his parables are frequently selected for more especial notice and regard: they have not only employed the talents of men of education and intellectual endowments, but they have also given an agreeable and useful exercise to the uncultured minds of plain unlettered Christians. And it is natural to suppose, that where the attention is for some time engaged on any portion of holy writ,

[r] Prov. i. 6, &c.

SERM. I. the understanding will be enlarged and probably the heart improved.

Such are the General Uses of parable: it illustrates, and it embodies, moral truth; and it gives an agreeable exercise to the understanding. In all these cases its advantage was not limited to the people to whom it was originally spoken, but extends to all in every clime or age, who pay any deference to the authority of the teacher.

4. To these I must add another use of parable, peculiar to the case of those to whom it was immediately addressed; namely, that it served on some occasions for a cautious and prudent vehicle of unwelcome and unpalatable truth. In this respect it was of singular service to those, who had the delicate and arduous task of administring reproof to persons in authority or in elevated stations of life. A teacher of morality could have but feeble hope of success in his teaching, were he directly to charge the robber with his robberies, the murderer with his murders, or the adulterer with his adulteries: but by couching truth under the veil of some fictitious narrative, which bore some latent resemblance to the case in question,

tion, he was able to introduce it, where otherwise it was not admissible. SERM. I.

Of this ingenious device no example can be more apposite than the parable which the prophet Nathan addressed to David: *There were two men in one city, the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing save one little ewe-lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the way-faring man that was come unto him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come unto him*[a].

The king, taking this for a real act of late occurrence in his kingdom, entertained a proper sense of the crime, and denounced a severe but impartial judgement on the offender; *As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die. And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing,*

[a] 2 Sam. xii. 1, &c.

SERM. I. *and because he had no pity.* And now it was that Nathan drew aside the veil, and said unto him, *Thou art the man.* The tale of an imaginary criminal was no other than a disguised picture of the king himself in his dealings to Uriah, from whom he had taken away his wife, and then had treacherously exposed him to the sword of his enemies. Had Nathan instantly accused him of adultery and murder, he might have revolted from the charge, or lifted up his hand against the man who made it. But by this cautious expedient of keeping his case out of sight for a time, the Prophet surprised him into an equitable judgment. The charge thus discreetly made produced all the good effects of a salutary reproof. It put him upon so deep an humiliation of himself, and so severe a contrition for his sins, as wrought in him a thorough reformation both of heart and life, and finally restored him to the peace of heaven.

Now this more peculiar use of parable in conveying reproof, or any other unpalatable truth, will apply to many of those similitudes, which our Lord addressed to the superior orders of the Jews.

When

When a certain lawyer sought to know, who his neighbour was, whom the law required him to love, our Lord would not make him a direct reply, being aware of his prejudice against the clear and open truth; but he gave his own opinion indirectly in a parable; namely, that of a Samaritan administering relief to a traveller in distress, when a Priest and a Levite had severally looked on him, and passed by on the other side.[t] Thus without expressing any doctrine of his own, he brought the lawyer to acknowledge even against his professional opinion, that he alone supports the character and relation of a neighbour in the spirit of the divine law, who without respect of nation or profession of faith contributes all he can to the peace and welfare of his fellow-creatures. SERM. I.

When the Pharisees and Scribes murmured at his conduct in receiving sinners and eating with them, he would not openly reprove them for their presumptuous conceit of their own merits, or their want of charity to their brethren who were left in ignorance and error. For what was in them a proper object

[t] Luke x. 29, &c.

SERM. I. of reproof they considered as a mark of a stricter righteousness: in keeping at a distance from the company of sinners they affected an extraordinary zeal for God's honour and service. But in order to justify himself, as also to recriminate on them, he replied to their murmurs under the covert form of parable. A prodigal youth, after spending all his portion in vicious extravagance, is reduced to wretchedness and want. In this condition being come to himself he repairs to his father's house a penitent, confessing his guilt and acknowledging his unworthiness. No sooner did his father see him, than he received him with compassion, with tenderness, and pardon, he acknowledged and attired him as a son, and provided a feast in gratulation of his recovery. But his brother was offended at this parental clemency, and would not partake in the festivities of that occasion: and when affectionately intreated to receive a brother with a brother's love, he pleaded his own long and faithful service as a title to superior favour and reward, and murmured at his father's partiality to an undeserving son, who had wasted his patrimony in the criminal gratification of his passions.

passions.[a] Thus, without expressing any censure of the Pharisees and Scribes, our Lord conveyed in parable a very keen reproof: for while he justified his own conduct in receiving sinners and conversing with them, he represented the disposition of these murmurers to take offence to be most repugnant to the gracious character of God; as they would have seen upon discovering the design of this similitude, that the father was an image of our heavenly Father in his dealings to repenting sinners, and that the elder son was an image of the Pharisees and Scribes in their presumptuous opinion of themselves and their want of charity to others. SERM. I.

III. AFTER stating the Characters and displaying the Uses of parable, it remains for me now to point out some principle of a right Interpretation. In this preliminary view it may be sufficient to notice one property in its composition, which may sometimes throw difficulties in the way of explanation; though these difficulties will disappear on a closer inquiry into the nature and spirit of this figurative kind

[a] Luke xv. 11, &c.

SERM. I. of speech. In the structure of a parable there is always to be found a general correspondence between the literal and the figurative sense. But it is by no means requisite that the parallel should be complete in every point. Nor are we to understand every circumstance in the narrative as bearing its appropriate import in the spiritual signification. Every parable is formed with a sufficient resemblance in the leading design, though we sometimes find a latitude of comparison in subordinate and inferior parts. Now this latitude of comparison has a close relation to the various uses of parable which I have recently discussed. It is to be ascribed in some cases to necessity, in others to convenience, and again in others to prudential reserve.

1. It proceeds in the first place from necessity. If temporal images are necessary in the first instance to convey some idea of spiritual truths, yet it must be confessed, that temporal images are inadequate to delineate spiritual truths with an accuracy of resemblance. And therefore a teacher, who has recourse to parable to communicate his ideas, is compelled in some cases to form his similitudes

tudes with some degree of laxity: the resemblance cannot be exact in all particulars. SERM. I.

When the kingdom of Heaven is likened to an inheritance which a father distributes to his children, the comparison necessarily fails in this, that the bounties of a mortal father become impaired by distribution. Having provided for his children once, the less he has to bestow upon them afterwards; and the more he has given to the portion of one son, the less he has reserved for the inheritance of another. But the bounties of our heavenly Father are copious as the light of heaven: though shed every day and diffused in every direction, they continue still inexhaustible. Some allowance we may be disposed to make for the murmurs of the elder son, when apprised of the reception which his brother found on his return to their father's house; as in the economy of domestic life there might be room for jealousy, lest a parent should abridge the allotted portion of the diligent and sober son in order to repair the fortunes of the Prodigal. But the same excuse cannot possibly be made for the murmurs of the Pharisees and Scribes, when

SERM. I. they saw our Lord receiving sinners and eating with them; because in the household of our heavenly Father the grace which God extends to sinners that repent, would make no abatement in the benefits of his favour toward those that are comparatively righteous. In the inheritance of Heaven there is abundant room for all, who attain the blessed privilege of being called the children of God.

When the kingdom of Heaven is likened to a feast, we must still bear in mind, that the happiness of the heavenly state has these two inestimable qualities, which no temporal image is able to convey, that it can never satiate, and that it will never cease. When God is likened to a master or a father, we must also bear in mind, that human characters are not to be exactly drawn without some alloy of human frailty. If therefore we should imagine that the master in one similitude is too austere, or that the father in another is too soft and indulgent, we must be sensible that these different features of character cannot possibly apply to God, who in his dealings with mankind duly tempers the authority of a master with the tenderness of a father.

Indeed

Indeed so great is the difference between things temporal and things eternal, between the attributes of God and the characters of men, that our Lord in some of his parables has chosen to place them in opposition rather than comparison; and to draw that inference of application from the contrast, which could not be obtained from a direct resemblance. SERM. I.

A steward is wise to his generation in disposing of the wealth of which he had the charge, by making to himself friends among the debtors of his Lord, who on his dismission from his office might receive him into their houses, and supply him with a maintenance for the remainder of his days. From this example of temporal wisdom, though exercised in a most dishonest way, our Lord instructs his Disciples, that they be wise to the generation that is to come, in disposing of the talents which their heavenly Master had committed to their stewardship, by making to themselves a certain friend in Heaven, who on their failure in this life and their ejection from the tabernacle of the body may receive them into everlasting habitations. [w]

[w] Luke xvi. 1, &c.

A widow

SERM. I. A widow is importunate in her suit for redress of grievance to a certain judge, who was a stranger to every principle of piety and justice: and by her importunity she finally prevails in her suit, when the justice of her plea would have passed without regard. From this example of success in prayer our Lord instructs his Disciples that they *ought always to pray and not to faint*, since their prayers are addressed to a judge of a very different character, who is righteous in all his ways and true in all his judgments; who lends a willing ear to the petitions of his votaries, and suffers himself to be moved by their continual prayers to the redress of all their grivances and the relief of all their wants. [x]

2. Again, this latitude of comparison must be attributed in some cases to convenience. If our Saviour sometimes used the language of parable because of its advantage to engage the attention and to impress the memory, this advantage is improved by the admission of several subordinate and inferior touches of character and incident, which have no further design than to

[x] Luke xviii. 1, &c.

con-

contribute to the relief and colouring of the narrative. Thus in several of the similitudes, which are scattered through the Gospel, we discover many little circumstances of this description, which, without extending any reference beyond the letter of the parable, have this good effect, that they give it a more interesting form, or represent it in the more engaging semblance of historical probability. SERM. I.

When the prodigal son returns to his father's house a penitent, the parable records, that he is received with every lively token of affection and forgiveness. The best robe is brought forth and put upon him, a ring is put on his hand, and shoes on his feet, the fatted calf is killed, the friends are assembled to a feast, and the house is enlivened with music and dancing.[y] All these particulars together form a lively picture of a father's joy on the nearly hopeless restoration of a son, who had abandoned himself to evil courses, and was dead to his kindred and his father's house. The scene is in a manner placed before our eyes, and we partake in the rejoicing of his friends on so welcome

[y] Luke xv. 22, &c.

an

SERM. I. an occasion. But when we inquire into the figurative and spiritual sense, it is not necessary to assign to every circumstance an express and peculiar import. It may suffice to look upon the whole in union as an animated image of the joy that subsists in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.

8. Again, this latitude of comparison proceeds in some cases from prudential reserve. On the same account, on which our Saviour chose to convey any unpalatable truth to the superior orders of the Jews in parable, he might also chuse to involve it in so deep a shade of parable as would conceal it from an obvious and immediate interpretation. In addressing himself to the Jews, especially those of a stricter order or more elevated office, as he complied with their prejudices, so he also reasoned on their positions, though they might be doubtful and even erroneous. Thus when the Pharisees and Scribes took offence at his conduct in receiving sinners and eating with them, he said in application of the parable of the lost and recovered sheep, that *there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just*

persons which need no repentance.[z] Now as by the sinner that repenteth he unquestionably alludes to the publicans and sinners, who were then attentive to his doctrines; so by the just persons which need no repentance he most probably glances at the Pharisees and Scribes, who were just in their own esteem, and who presumptuously thought that they needed no repentance. Thus our Saviour spoke of them according to their own opinions of themselves; though it is evident from the tenour of his conversation that he looked upon them in a very different light. And accordingly he told them at another time, but on a like occasion, that he *came not to call the righteous*, or those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, *but sinners to repentance*[a].

SERM. I.

Thus also in the parable, that follows in the same train of discourse, our Lord represents the elder son remonstrating with his father for a too indulgent reception of his prodigal brother, and pleading his own long and faithful service as a title to a higher favour in his father's heart, and a larger portion, if

[z] Luke xv. 7. [a] Luke v. 32.

not

SERM. I. not the whole of his inheritance[b]. This closely expresses the sentiments of the Pharisees and Scribes, when they murmured at our Saviour's charitable demeanour toward repenting sinners. But when he further states the father's answer to the remonstrance of the elder son, *Son, thou art always with me, and all that I have is thine*, we must conclude, that as far as this passage has an eye to them, it is grounded on their positions and opinions of themselves, though very different from those which our Lord entertained: as if he had said, "Admitting what you profess, that you "have always been immediately in the "presence and under the eye of your "heavenly Father, admitting what you "assume, that to you above all other "people pertains the inheritance of "promise; yet still it is meet, that in-"stead of murmuring you should re-"joice, even as the inhabitants of Hea-"ven rejoice, on the recovery of such as "were dead in sin, but are alive unto "God[c], were lost to hope, and are found "again to the way of salvation."

In this manner was our Saviour

[b] Luke xv. 25, &c. [c] Rom. vi. 11.

pleased,

pleased, in discoursing to the superior orders of the Jews, to shade the severity of his reproof by a cautious and prudential reserve. We are not however to infer from this, that he was restrained from using a more open language out of any respect or fear of his audience. For being true himself, and teaching the way of God in truth, he cared not for any man, neither regarded he the person of men[d]. But having a work appointed him to do of the utmost importance to the world, he cautiously forbore every measure, which in the natural tendency of human dispositions might interrupt or frustrate that design. And therefore till the final purpose of his mission was on the point of being fulfilled, he seems to have avoided every form or stile of reproof, which was likely to provoke any violence against him before his appointed hour was come. But as the time drew nigh when he was to be offered on the cross a sacrifice for sin, the reserve which he had hitherto maintained was no longer expedient for him to support: He now became altogether clear and open in his reproofs,

SERM. I.

[d] Mat. xxii. 16.

SERM. I. and broke out into the keenest and severest invectives against every thing, which was reprehensible either in their sentiments or their practice.

Now when we consider parable as employed with a view of shading truth from too direct and obvious an explication, we make some approach to the reason, which our Lord himself assigns for speaking to the multitude in parables.[e] But this is a topic of too great importance for a transient observation. It will furnish a sufficient argument for a separate discourse.

[e] Mat. xiii. 10.

SERMON

SERMON II.

THE PROFESSED DESIGN OF PARABLE.

MATTHEW XIII. 10.

And the Disciples came and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

HAVING treated in my last discourse on the several properties of parable, as they may be inferred both from reason and experience, it is incumbent on me now to enquire into the motive, which our Lord himself assigns for speaking in parables to the Jews. This motive is apparently difficult to reconcile with those beneficial purposes, which distinguish the Gospel of Christ, as it seems to express an intention of shading, rather than illustrating, those truths, which he came professedly to disclose.

SERM. II.

SERM. II. To solve the difficulties that here occur, it may be useful to premise, that when our Saviour first began to teach, his language was easy to the understandings of all his hearers; as may be instanced in the Sermon on the Mount, which abounds in maxims and precepts delivered in a clear and open stile. It was not indeed altogether free from parable; for this was the general character of all his discourse. But the parable, which he then employed, was of the sententious or proverbial kind; always very brief, not extending to a greater length than a single comparison or a slight allusion, and therefore not obscure or difficult of apprehension either to the Disciples or the common people.

This clear and open stile he continued to employ till the time, when he entered into a ship on the coast of Galilee, and taught the multitude who were ranged along the shore. On which occasion he addressed them, not as he had hitherto been accustomed in a language plain and easy to the understanding, but in a series of parables, expanded into the fuller form of continued narrative, and sparingly accompanied with any kind of exposition or application.

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Observing this difference in the manner of his discourse, and probably surprised that a Teacher come from God, who professed himself a light unto the world, should cover his doctrines with any degree of shade, his Disciples came and said unto him, *Why speakest thou unto them in parables?* His immediate answer was, *Because unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but unto them it is not given.* SERM. II.

This sentence on the first consideration may be thought a hard saying; and some who read it may be disposed to say, Who can hear or comprehend it[a]? For beside its counteracting those advantages of parable, already noticed, to illustrate and embody moral truth, does it not express a partial purpose in the decrees of Heaven, to extend the benefits of the Gospel to one class of men, and to withhold them from another?

However hard this saying may appear to be, I trust the difficulties of it will yield to a patient and temperate investigation.

When we contemplate the attributes of that great First Cause, who is the

[a] John vi. 60.

SERM. II. Creator and Governor of the world, we must acknowledge, that he doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and none can stay his hand, and say unto him, What doest thou?[b] As the potter hath power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour;[c] so the sovereign Artist of the universe has an unquestionable right over his creatures: so as of the same people to exalt one man, and to abase another man, of the same species to extend the benefits of his knowledge and the blessings of his grace to one class of men, and to withhold them from another.

As in the natural world he has placed some in prosperous, and others in adverse fortune, under the benignant influence of temperate suns and showers, and others under the rigours of a burning or a freezing zone; so also in the spiritual world he has given to some the advantages of a religious education, and others he suffers to continue in a state of ignorance and error; on some he has diffused the noon-day light of the Sun of Righteousness, and others he has left

[b] Dan. iv. 35. [c] Rom. ix. 21.

in

in the gloom and shades of heathen night. All these inequalities both of natural and spiritual gifts we must of necessity refer to the sole and sovereign will of God. And as in the dispositions of nature it becomes us to be resigned to that Providence, which has exalted one and abased another; so in the dispensations of grace it behoves us humbly to acquiesce in the declaration of our Lord, that to some it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, and to others it is not given. In all our contemplations on the government of God it becomes us to say, Is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own? And since he is evidently good to some, shall our eye be evil, if we do not immediately perceive him to be equally good to all[d]?

SERM. II.

Yet while we bow to the authority of him, who made us, and still disposes of us according to his good pleasure, we have this great encouragement in committing ourselves to his absolute disposal, that whatever he determines is completely wise and just and good: He is righteous in all his ways, and true

[d] Mat. xx. 15.

SERM. II. in all his judgments. And though it is not for creatures to discover the more mysterious parts of his counsel in the government of the world, yet even with our finite understandings we may discover the traces of consummate wisdom, justice, and benevolence.

It is one great article of religious faith, that this world is designed for a state of probation or discipline. To constitute such a state it was expedient that there should be various degrees and measures of endowment, both natural and spiritual; that some should be in high situations of life, and others again in low; that some should be placed in the sun, and others in the shade; that some should have many talents, and that others should have few. But in order to counterbalance these inequalities of endowment it is a principle of divine justice, which our Lord very frequently repeats, that *where much has been given, much also will be required.* On the man, who is gifted with an abundance of worldly goods, a greater duty rests to improve his abundance to the glory of God and the benefit of men. On the man, who is blest with a high degree of spiritual light, a great-

greater duty rests to improve his know- SERM.
ledge by a faithful and universal service. II.

The same principle implies, that where less has been given, less also will be required. A righteous God does not claim from the poor the same distributions of charity, which are due from the rich: nor does he demand from the ignorant and unenlightened the same measure of services, which he expects from those, who abundantly know and understand his will.

Still however he expects of those, who are endowed in the least degree, that they make a return in some proportion to what they have received. And while he looks with approbation on them, who labour to improve their superior portion of gifts, he will not excuse those, who on the plea of a very scanty endowment in any kind of talents neglect altogether to turn them to some account.

It is further to be noted, that while the Sovereign of the world has distributed his gifts in various measures and proportions, he has also left it in some degree to the choice and power of men to increase or to diminish all these gifts, according as they are disposed to use them

SERM. II. them well or ill. It is an equitable operation of divine Providence, which experience plainly shews us in the economy of nature, that the man, who exercises his talents or capacities of any kind, by consequence improves them; that the man, who neglects to exercise them, by consequence impairs them. In like manner it is a principle of divine justice in the economy of grace, which is frequently advanced in the discourses of our Lord, that *whosoever hath*, or well employs his spiritual gifts, *to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not*, or lives as if he hath them not, by wasting or abusing them, *from him shall be taken even that which he hath.*

This maxim he introduces and applies on the present occasion, *Therefore speak I to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.* To the Disciples were openly imparted the mysteries of the Gospel dispensation, because they had honestly received and assiduously improved those divine communications which he had already made: to the multitude they were couched under the shade of parable, because they had shewn

shewn no disposition either honestly to receive or assiduously to improve them. SERM. II.

The great obstacle to a right understanding among the Jews was an inconsiderate and in some respects a perverse and wilful prejudice against the person and doctrine of Jesus Christ. This prevailed, though in different measures and qualities, both among the superior, and among the common orders of the people.

Offended at the lowliness of his birth and the poverty of his condition in the world, the Pharisees and Scribes despised his words and vilified his works. When he indulged his Disciples in the reasonable comforts and innocent recreations of life, they said in derision, *Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber*[e]: when he conversed with the poor and such as were in need of spiritual counsel and assistance, they opprobriously called him *a friend of Publicans and sinners*[e]: and when by the finger of God he healed all manner of disease and infirmities among the people, they blasphemously ascribed his miracles of mercy to the operations of the Devil[f].

[e] Mat. xi. 19. [f] Mat. xii. 24.

The

SERM. II. The common people indeed had more favourable sentiments both of his words and works. Disappointed as they were in the lowliness of his appearance, yet when they heard the energy of his doctrines, they could not forbear saying, *Never man spake like this man*[g]; when they saw the power of his miracles, they were compelled to acknowledge, *It was never so seen in Israel*[h]. Thus they had no scruple to regard him as a Prophet mighty both in word and deed. And when he had miraculously fed five thousand of them in the wilderness they were brought to look upon him in a still superior light as the long-expected Minister of heavenly grace; *This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world*[i]. Yet still they were perplexed with doubt, that the person whom they looked for in the most exalted character should appear in the garb of poverty and humility. To reconcile this appearance with their long-cherished prejudices, they were willing to believe, that he was then for a time under a veil, out of which he would shortly break in every cir-

[g] John vii. 46. [h] Mat. ix. 33. [i] John vi. 14.

cum-

cumstance of worldly greatness. And we find them forward to verify these carnal hopes even by lawless and unwarrantable means. For as soon as he had given this high testimony of his divine character in miraculously feeding the multitude in the wilderness, they were minded to come and take him by force to make him a king[1]. SERM. II.

When thus the different orders of the Jews were under the dominion of their respective prejudices, they were by no means competent to receive the fulness of that light which he had to communicate. And hence in speaking to a mixed assembly of hearers he judged it prudent to assume some reserve in the stile of his discourse, so as equally to defeat the malice of the Pharisees, and to repress the carnal expectations of the common people.

Yet we must not hence by any means infer, that he had a design to cover his doctrine from any class of men with an impenetrable shade: for otherwise he would not have so earnestly called upon the attention of all, as he frequently does at the close of a parable, *Who hath*

[1] John vi. 15.

ears

SERM. II. *ears to hear, let him hear.* In calling the attention of the ear he unquestionably demands the application of the mind: And therefore these words import no other sense but this, Who hath faculties of understanding, let him understand. It was indeed the character of too many among his hearers, that they had ears to hear, yet they did not hear. But this dulness of apprehension, if in part it be ascribed to that figurative language in which he spoke, must principally be imputed to that carnal and worldly prejudice with which they heard him. Though he covered his instruction with the shade of parable, yet the shade was not so deep, as to baffle the research of those, who endeavoured to divest themselves of prejudice, and applied all their diligence with humility to explore it. For in this exhortation he solemnly invites them to understand; though he would not press conviction on them, when they came so much disposed to misconceive his word, and shewed a careless indifference, whether they understood or no.

The Disciples attended with a purer aim and therefore to a more effectual

purpose. For though they do not appear to have been exempt from the common prejudice of their countrymen in their notions of their Master's person and character, yet this prejudice was more than counterbalanced by a desire to understand the word, and a disposition to improve it. He therefore gratifies their honest wish for spiritual truth by speaking to them in a plainer stile: and whenever they found themselves incompetent to understand those parables, which he had been delivering to a mixed audience, he was always ready, when apart with them, to supply them with an interpretation. In conversing with the multitude, as the Evangelist observes, *without a parable spake he not unto them; but when they were alone, he expounded all things to his Disciples*[m].

SERM. II.

In harmony with this is the language, which our Saviour uses on another occasion, at a time when his Disciples had been endowed with extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit; *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise*

[m] Mark iv. 34.

and

SERM. II. *and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes*[n]. He thankfully acknowledges the wisdom of divine Providence in suffering the mysteries of the spiritual kingdom to evade the understandings of the Pharisees, who were wise in their own conceits, as well as of the common people, who were prudent according to the notions of the world in their search after temporal opulence and honours, while they were freely laid open to the artless and comparatively unprejudiced minds of his followers, who possessed the simplicity of little children.

On this economy he enlarges in the sequel of his present conversation. To the multitude, who came with prejudice to hear, he applies a denunciation of displeasure, as given by the Prophet under the law; while to his Disciples he pronounces from himself a beatitude of grace more congenial with the spirit of the Gospel: *And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears*

[n] Luke x. 21.

are

are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them°.—*But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many Prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

SERM. II.

THIS part of our Lord's discourse may suggest a wider range of observation. It is worthy of remark that his design, in speaking to the Jews in parable, corresponds with that of God himself, in speaking to their fathers under the types and shadows of the Mosaic law. After being long immersed in the gloom of Egyptian bondage, the children of Israel were not able to endure the full light of heavenly truth; and therefore he revealed himself to them only partially and through a cloud. They were not competent to receive a pure and spiritual law supported by the promise of better things

° Is. vi. 9, 10.

SERM. II. to come: and therefore he typified the principles of moral duty under a number of rites and ceremonies which had no intrinsic moral worth, and he shadowed forth the promise of a future life under the prospect of a temporal inheritance. In no deeper light did these communications appear to the carnal apprehensions of the common people: amused with the form of godliness they had no disposition to inquire into the power thereof; and fed to the full with the good things of the land of Canaan, they did not set their hearts on a better and more enduring substance: hence they were not prepared for the acceptance of a new covenant, which would establish a correcter rule of duty and communicate a fuller prospect of reward.

Yet while the common people in their attention to the letter, overlooked the spirit of these institutions, there were many prophets and righteous men, who desired to see and to hear the secret things of God. And because they were solicitous to receive the truth, and shewed a disposition to improve it, a greater measure of light was imparted to them from the source of light; in con-

consequence of which they regarded these ceremonial institutions as emblems of moral duty, and their temporal inheritance on earth as a pledge and assurance of an eternal inheritance in heaven. But though they lived under a sense of this valuable truth, they were far from partaking in the fulness of that light which was afterwards to dawn upon the world. Yet from a series of prophetic intimations they were taught to understand, that a Prophet greater than any of themselves was to appear at an appointed time, who should open heaven to the view of earth, and manifest the Father unto the world in his fairest and brightest attributes of grace and truth. To this divine Personage, emphatically called *the light and the life of men*[p], they solicitously turned their eyes; but though they desired to see, they were not admitted to see. Such fulness of communication was reserved for the Disciples: it was their superior privilege to see with their eyes and to hear with their ears *the Word of life*[q]. While the Prophets only saw him through the veil of distant

SERM. II.

[p] John i. 4.

SERM. II. time, the Disciples saw him face to face: while the Prophets only saw him in the doubtful twilight of the Mosaic dispensation, the Disciples saw him risen on the world, *the Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings*[r].

The whole economy of revelation, from the first of the Patriarchs to the last of the Prophets, seems in union to have pointed to some extraordinary Personage, to rise in later times for the consolation of his people, who should bear the united characters of a Prophet, a Priest, and a King. As a Prophet, he was to preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound[s]. As a Priest, he was to yield his soul an offering for sin, to bear the sin of many, and to make intercession for the transgressors[t]. As a King, he was to have the government upon his shoulders, to be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace: of the increase of his government and peace there should be no

[r] 1 John i. 1. [r] Mal. iv. 2.
[s] Isa. lxi. 1. [t] Isa. liii. 10, 12.

end;

end; upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice henceforth even for ever[u].

SERM. II.

Of this great Minister of Heaven the Jews had long entertained a hope. But though they were nearly accurate as to the time of his coming, yet they had very erroneous conceptions both of his mission and character. In compliance with the customary language and opinions of the Jews the Prophets had frequently described him under all such images, as belong to worldly dignities and opulence. But the passions of the people led them to accept in a literal sense, what unbiassed reason might have taught them to understand in a figurative. Their avarice was engaged by the description of that plenty, which would accompany his steps; their ambition was inflamed with a picture of those honours, which would attend his dominion. Hence when our Saviour came in the garb of poverty and humility, his appearance was totally at variance with their carnal and worldly prejudice.

[u] Isa. ix. 6, 7.

SERM. II. In looking for a Prophet, they might expect him to announce their deliverance from the Roman yoke and their aggrandisement among the nations. But the constant strain of his prophetic office was to preach the gospel to the poor, and administer consolation to the penitent; or if he touched on temporal subjects, it was in a strain not at all in unison with their ambitious aims, since he denounced the destruction of Jerusalem and the total dissolution of the Hebrew state.

In looking for a Priest, they might expect him to appear in the rich and splendid vesture of the sons of Aaron, ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices in the temple. They had little conception that he had a gift to yield of greater efficacy than the blood of all the victims, which were continually offered on the Mosaic altars, that he was come to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

In looking for a King, they might expect to find him in a palace and on a throne, surrounded by guards and courtiers; or else in a field, commanding armies in successful warfare, and leading into bondage their oppressors. But

so far was our Lord from answering such ambitious hopes, that he came in the garb of a lowly peasant; he wanted the common refuge of the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air; he had not where to lay his head. And yet he had a kingdom to establish of greater authority than any temporal dominion; since instead of exacting the homage of the body, it demanded the surrender of the soul; instead of being confined to the Children of Israel, it had all power in heaven and in earth; instead of being limited in time, it would exist to all eternity. SERM. II.

When the Jews thus totally mistook his mission and character, they were by no means prepared to receive his doctrine; and as through prejudice they had misunderstood the writings of the Prophets, so also through prejudice they misunderstood his words[v]. Thus was it the character of the people in our Saviour's time, as it had been of their Forefathers in the days of the Prophets, that they saw but did not perceive, they heard but did not understand.

[v] John v. 47.

SERM. II. The Disciples beheld him in another point of view.

In him they saw a Prophet of a Covenant very different in spirit from that, which God had made with the Children of Israel. For instead of those ancient rites and ceremonies, which only served unto an example and shadow of heavenly things, he now put his laws into their minds and wrote them in their hearts: instead of that limited dispensation, in which a man was satisfied to teach his brother or his neighbour the knowledge of the Lord, he opened his religion to the world, so that all might know him from the least even to the greatest: instead of that rigorous ordinance of the ancient law, which exacted the penalty denounced upon every transgression, he imparted a doctrine of grace and benevolence, which declares to the penitent that God will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities he will remember no more[w].

In him they saw a Priest, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the hea-

[w] Jer. xxxi. 31, &c. Heb. viii. 8, &c.

vens;

vens; who, instead of offering daily sacrifices as the Priests of the order of Aaron, hath once for all offered up himself a sacrifice for the sins of the people, and on the merit of that sacrifice is now entered into the Holy of Holies, even into Heaven itself, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us[x]. SERM. II.

In him they saw a King, who is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, who was and is and is to come, the Almighty; who once was dead, and is alive for evermore, and has the keys of hell and death[y]; who, having waged a successful warfare against the Rulers of darkness, has entered in triumph into the heaven of heavens, and has made this animating promise to all his faithful subjects, *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne*[z].

In all these characters was he regarded by the Disciples: and therefore blessed were their eyes, for they saw, and their ears, for they heard.

[x] Heb. vii. 25, &c. [y] Rev. i. 8, 18. [z] Rev. iii. 21.

We

SERM. II. We must indeed confess that his sayings were not always clear to them at the time when they were first delivered. For we sometimes find that after he had spoken, as we might suppose, to their understandings, yet *they understood not that saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not*[a]. Incompetent at once to divest themselves of popular prejudice, they were slow to apprehend his words, and they continued even to his death to doubt at least of the design of his coming and the nature of his kingdom; as appears from a circumstance which occurred on the very eve of his passion, the strife that was among them, who should be the greatest[b].

As the eyes of their understanding were yet too weak for the fulness of spiritual light, he judged it prudent to unfold it by a gradual communication, till they became better competent to bear it. But the time was drawing nigh, when he would no longer speak in parables, either to his Disciples or the world, but would plainly shew them all the counsel of the Father[c]. Accord-

[a] Luke ix. 45. [b] Luke xxii. 24.
[c] John xvi. 25.

ingly

ingly he told them, that when the Comforter, that is, the Spirit of truth, was come, he would guide them into all truth, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them[d]. And this promise was remarkably fulfilled upon them on the tenth day after his ascension into heaven; when they received a miraculous aid from the Spirit of divine wisdom, when their minds were totally divested of that prejudice, which had hitherto obscured their faculties of apprehension, and their eyes were fully opened to the light of all those gospel truths, which before that time they were not able to bear[e]. SERM. II.

Thus although he expressly came a light unto the world; although with equal elegance and fitness he is called *the Sun of righteousness;* yet like the morning sun under a cloud he continued for a time to invest himself in the shade of parable, because the people to whom he came were not able to endure a clearer light. But as soon as the state of this divine economy allowed,

[d] John xiv. 26. xv. 26. [e] Acts ii.

the

SERM. XI. the cloud was removed from before the eyes of men.

So great indeed and inveterate is the prejudice of the Jews, that even unto this day the veil is upon their hearts [f]. The light still shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not [g]. But to Christians it is granted with open face to see the glory of the Lord. To all true Believers, as well as to the first Disciples, it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven. To such, as acknowledge Christ in deed and in truth, the word which he delivered once is intelligibly shewn. Divested of that mist of prejudice, which obstructed the moral vision of the Jews, we are competent to draw some of the most edifying lessons of practical instruction from those very parables, which were generally so obscure on their first delivery: and all, who apply themselves to an honest and diligent inquiry are enabled to understand them, from the greatest even to the least. As they are now presented to us in the word of God, we cannot easily

[f] 2 Cor. iii. 15. [g] John i. 5.

select

select any portion of scripture more engaging or more instructive, whether to the uncultured understandings of the common people, or the tender capacities of children. Thus Christ continues in his written word to preach the gospel to the poor, to reveal himself to babes. SERM. II.

We must allow nevertheless, that there are difficulties in the ways of providence, which we cannot solve; there are secrets in the divine counsels, which we cannot comprehend. While we are under the veil of mortality, we see only a part of that great mystery, which hereafter shall be revealed. We are but children in knowledge during the present life: and we cannot reach the maturity of wisdom, till we attain the fulness of our stature in a future world. According to this is the reasoning of the Apostle; *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known*[h]. In that state of pure intelligence the Son

[h] 1 Cor. xiii. 11, 12.

of

SERM. II. of God will no longer speak to his Disciples in parables, but will plainly shew them the Father: God himself shall remove from his faithful votaries the face of the covering now cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations[i]: they shall be enabled to comprehend all the mysteries of godliness: awaking from the sleep of death, they shall behold the face of God in righteousness; and being restored to his image, and being recreated after his own likeness, shall be completely satisfied[k].

I CLOSE this discourse with a few words of practical application.—We may learn from this enquiry, what obligation rests upon us to be thankful to God for so freely imparting to us the benefits of divine knowledge, for giving us the means of grace on earth and the hopes of happiness in heaven. In all these communications of the gospel treasures we have signal advantages not only beyond the Heathens, who had very faint and confused opinions both of the business and the end of man, but

[i] Isa. xxv. 7. [k] Psalm xvii. 17, 25.

also

also beyond the Jews, who were left to conjecture these important truths, as they were faintly signified through the shade of ancient types and parables: In common with the Disciples we have advantages even beyond the Prophets and righteous men of ancient times, in seeing all those mysteries revealed, which they were anxious, but were not able to explore. SERM. II.

Now if we would avail ourselves of these peculiar favours, it is incumbent on us, that we bring to the study of the divine word unprejudiced and well-disposed minds. For want of this qualification it was, that the multitude of the Jews were suffered, even when the light was risen upon them, to continue in darkness, when instruction was imparted to them from above, to remain with the veil upon their hearts. Because they came without an honest purpose to receive the truth, our Lord was pleased to impart it under the shade of parable, not so deep indeed as to baffle the research of devout and honest minds, yet certainly too deep for the eyes of prejudice or passion to explore. And if we read the word with prejudice or want of care and thought, we shall be open

SERM. II. open to the same reproof, and incur the same sentence, which our Lord applied to the Jews: though we see, we shall not perceive; and though we hear, we shall not understand. Thus we shall not be converted to the faith that is in righteousness, neither shall we be healed of those maladies of the soul, of which our Saviour came to heal us.

But if we bring industrious and well-disposed minds to receive whatever God has revealed, whether pleasing or unwelcome to us, if in spite of every carnal and worldly prejudice we embrace in our belief all the doctrines he has taught, and comprehend in our practice all the duties he requires, we have every assurance of hope, that the Spirit of God will assist and facilitate our research; we shall grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ; we shall abound more and more in spiritual gifts; our understandings will be enlightened, and our hearts will be improved: thus shall we partake in the benediction given to the first Disciples, Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

And while we are anxious to know the will of God, it is also incumbent on

us that we apply all our diligence to do it. For vain is our profession of the gospel, and vain are our inquiries into the mysteries of heaven, unless we add to our faith virtue, and improve our knowledge into practice. For as faith incites us to virtue, as knowledge disposes us to practice, so again the cultivation of virtue tends to enliven and invigorate our faith, and the practice of our duty contributes to enlarge and rectify our knowledge. The Grace of God is imparted in abundant measure to those, and those only who are assiduous to improve it. For this we should always bear in mind as an immutable principle of divine justice, *Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.* To the Disciples it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, not because they were more versed than other men in sacred knowledge, but because they sought to practise all the laws of godliness which those mysteries conveyed. And we may trust in the divine grace, that if we diligently explore the scriptures with a desire and purpose, not only to know, but also to

SERM. II.

SERM. II. do the divine will, we shall be guided in exploring the terms of our acceptance, we shall be guarded from falling into any dangerous error.

If thus during the present state of discipline and trial we diligently cultivate the rudiments of heavenly knowledge, we shall train and prepare ourselves for the full maturity of our natures in another world, when the film of mortal doubt shall be removed from our eyes, when he, that is the Word of God, shall manifest his glory to us, and for ever dwell among us full of grace and truth [m].

[m] John i. 14.

SERMON

SERMON III.

THE APPLICATION OF PARABLE.

LUKE XII. 41.

Then Peter said unto him, Lord speakest thou this Parable unto us, or even unto all?

IN this portion of the Gospel our Lord is very copiously speaking of the duty of Christian vigilance; to which he exhorts his Disciples from the pattern of diligent and faithful servants, who are always in a state of preparation for the coming of their Lord. Hereupon Peter, who appears to have been more inquisitive in every branch of knowledge than the rest of the Apostles, inquires in these words, whether the parable was designed for the Disciples only, or for all other people. If the sequel of our Saviour's discourse, as recorded in this Evangelist, do not yield us an explicit answer to his Apostle's

SERM. III. inquiry, we shall find it expressly given in the corresponding passage of another Evangelist; wherein, having treated of the same duty of vigilance in the same vein of parable, he closes his admonitions with these impressive words; *And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch*[a].

Now the same improvement is to be made of all his parables. While addressed to the Disciples, they have a reference to all the Jews: while spoken immediately to his cotemporaries and countrymen the Jews, they extend an application to all mankind in every country and through every age.

The first revelation of the divine will in the Patriarchal age was confined to one Family. The next under the Mosaic Economy was restricted to one People. The last under Jesus Christ was laid open to all the World. He came not to limit his instruction to his followers, or even to his countrymen; for he came for the benefit of all people, nations, and languages under heaven. Yet it must not pass unnoticed, that during his abode on earth the whole of his discourse, and the parables in particular,

[a] Mark xiii. 37.

are

are formed with an express and more appropriate regard to the conditions and characters of those, with whom he had immediate intercourse. SERM. III.

To render all his sayings of practical advantage to ourselves, it is our principal concern to understand, in what respect they bear an application to our own hearts and lives. But in order to understand with greater accuracy of judgement, it is expedient that we acquaint ourselves in the first instance with that special and primary application, which they bore to the people and the land of Israel.

I therefore trust it cannot be accounted foreign to the purpose, in which I am engaged, of elucidating the parables, that I offer some brief historical account of the people to whom they were addressed, and of the several characters and orders under which they fell.

At an early period of time the notion of a true God was become corrupted or forgotten in the world, and all mankind were fallen into error and idolatry. To keep up some memorial of himself, and some appearance of

SERM. III. the true religion, God selected Abraham, and called him out of his country, his kindred, and his Father's house. This call he readily obeyed: *He believed in the Lord, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the Friend of God*[b]. Having proved him worthy of this sacred choice and name by many exercises of faith, God promised to his offspring the land in which he then sojourned, and solemnly assured him with a reference to Christ, *In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*[c].

This blessing was transmitted from Abraham to Isaac, and from Isaac to Jacob. The Family of Jacob consisted of twelve Sons, the Fathers of the twelve Tribes of Israel. One of these, namely Joseph, was sold by his Brethren into Egypt, where by the special destination of Providence he rose from slavery to the highest office in the kingdom. His fortune brought the whole House of Israel into Egypt; where they settled as inhabitants, and where they multiplied exceedingly. But after some generations the Egyptians, who had at first received them as guests and friends,

[b] Gen. xv. 6. James ii. 23. [c] Gen. xxii. 18.

began

began to treat them as slaves and enemies, and imposed upon them tasks too heavy to be borne. And now they were visited by the God of their Fathers in the character of a Redeemer and an Avenger; who having accomplished their deliverance from bondage conducted them into the wilderness, and gave them a law in thunders and lightnings from Mount Sinai. In this desert region they sojourned or wandered forty years under the guidance of Moses, being all the while miraculously sustained in food and raiment. SERM. III.

At the close of this appointed term they were conducted by Joshua into the promised land of Canaan, which they divided among themselves and cultivated. During their first establishment in this land they were under the government of Judges, whom in critical times a special providence advanced for the protection and redemption of their country. But afterwards they desired to be governed by Kings like other nations. The kingly power, having subsisted for a time in Saul, became hereditary in the house of David. By the valour of this Prince the state attained some consequence among the nations

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round: but it reached its highest splendour under the peaceful sceptre of Solomon his Son, who was famous for his wisdom, his riches, and his prosperity; and who distinguished his reign by building a magnificent Temple to the God of Israel.

Under his Son Rehoboam the royal inheritance was diminished by the revolt of ten tribes, who formed themselves into the separate kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin: by this opprobrious character he is usually mentioned in the sacred history, as well for conspiring this revolt, as for that impious policy which he took to secure himself upon the throne: for suspecting that the people might return to their allegiance to the house of David, if they continued their yearly visit to the Temple of Jerusalem, he established an idolatrous worship in his own territory, by which they became altogether alienated from the God of their Fathers, and fell into all the abominations of the Heathen. By a series of Prophets they were repeatedly warned of their evil ways and exhorted to return to the worship of the true God. But when they persevered in their idolatries God

God at last abandoned them to the fatal consequence of their apostacy: their kingdom was overthrown by the King of Assyria, and themselves were carried away captive into a distant land, whence they were never suffered to return. SERM. III.

The two Tribes of Judah and Benjamin, now composing the kingdom of Judah, continued faithful to the progeny of David: and having the Temple of the true God among them they retained some reverence for his name and worship. Yet they also frequently fell into idolatries, notwithstanding the remonstrance of many Prophets and righteous men: till the measure of their crimes being filled, God was pleased to surrender them into the hand of the King of Babylon, who destroyed their city and temple, laid waste their country, and led the people into captivity. Their sentence however was not so desperate as that of their brethren. After they had endured a servitude and exile of seventy years, the Babylonian empire was overthrown, and the captive nation was restored by Cyrus King of Persia; a Prince memorable in prophetic writings, being called by name two hundred years before his birth, as the Anointed of the Lord, the Shep-

SERM. III. Shepherd of his People, expressly ordained to release his captives, and to restore the people of Judah to freedom and their country [d].

During the subsistence of the Persian Kings, the Jews were under their protection and made a part of their dominion. When that kingdom was overthrown by Alexander, they were transferred to the Macedonian empire; and on the division of that empire they were consigned to the Kings of Syria. But enduring from them an intolerable weight of tyranny and oppression they asserted their independance under the family of the Maccabees, and gratefully accepted their Deliverers for their Rulers. When the Romans overrun the East, they attempted no resistance to that victorious power. The dissension between two brothers, who were rivals for the throne of Judea, invited Pompey to determine the succession; and this decision gave the Romans a pretext for assuming an authority over the Jews. The Prince, whom they had placed on the throne, being taken captive by the Parthians on a sudden invasion of Jerusalem, his chief Minister Herod went

[d] Isa. xliv. 28. xlv. 1, &c.

to

to Rome to solicit the cause of this Prince's family: but what he affected to solicit for another he obtained for himself: and though by birth an Idumean, he returned under Roman patronage the King of the Jews. After a long reign of tyranny and cruelty, he transmitted his sceptre to his son Archelaus; who having reigned a few years was for some default dethroned by the authority of Rome. Hereupon the kingdom of Judea was committed to a Roman Governor. And though some portion of this country was afterwards consigned to Princes and Tetrarchs of the house of Herod, yet it was now to all intents reduced to the condition of a Roman province. Yet according to the customary policy of that people, the Jews were suffered to retain their ancient form of worship and a great portion of their civil government. SERM. III.

At this time it was, when the sceptre was departing from Judah, that Shiloh came, that long-expected Prophet who was sent into the world[c]. To shew the reception which he found

[c] Gen. xlix. 10.

among

SERM. III. among the Jews, I proceed to give some outline of the several orders, professions, or sects under which they fell.

Their constitution may be considered under these three branches of Ritual, Moral, and Civil Economy.

1. The Ritual Ordinances were committed to the direction and ministry of the Levites, a Tribe of Israel, originally set apart for the peculiar service of God, and distinguished from their Brethren in this respect, that they had no inheritance in the promised land, but had the tithe of all increase appointed for their maintenance. Out of this Tribe the House of Aaron was selected for the superior functions of the Priesthood to offer sacrifice of every kind in the Tabernacle: and over these was the High Priest; whose peculiar office it was once every year to enter alone into the Holy of Holies with the blood of a victim, and to make an atonement for the sins of the people.

This establishment continued when the service of the Tabernacle was transferred to the Temple; on the building of which the seat of divine worship was fixed at Jerusalem; so that a large portion of the Levites became from their functions

functions established in the Metropolis; by which they would escape the idolatrous defection and consequent dispersion of the ten Tribes of Israel. And though their functions were suspended, when the Temple was laid in ashes by the Babylonians, yet on the restoration of the People and the rebuilding of the Temple under Cyrus their ministerial character revived. In the Princes of the House of Maccabees the office of High Priest became united with the sovereign authority. But on the accession of Herod, who was not of the stock of Aaron, nor even of the race of Israel, it was again separated from it. And when the country was converted into a Roman Province, it was usual for the Governor to change the High Priest every year. SERM. III.

2. For the preaching or dispensing of the Moral Law no special Order was expressly appointed by the Mosaic Institution. Yet in early times a School of Prophets was established, whose office it seems to have been to offer prayer and praise to God, and to inculcate on the people obedience to his laws. Afterwards there arose a superior Order of Prophets, immediately visited by

SERM. III. by the Spirit of God, who by the privilege of working miracles and foretelling things to come gave infallible evidence that they were the Embassadors of Heaven, and in that high character declared the will of God, announcing to the people either mercies or judgements, according as they had merited his favour or incurred his displeasure. The declarations of these Prophets in earlier times were confined to oral delivery; but during the government of Kings they were committed to record in the Old Testament. Thus constituting a great portion of the Holy Scriptures, they are standing testimonies of the providential care of God in governing the world: and while they designate the decrees of heaven toward the chosen people, they also announce the last Dispensation of a Prophet in every respect superior to themselves, who should come in later times for the redemption and consolation, not of Israel only, but of all the world.

When this divine influence was withdrawn, or but sparingly communicated after the Babylonian bondage, the prophetic office was in some degree supplied by a Profession of men, who are in-

indifferently called the Scribes or the Lawyers. These men professed, as their names imply, to write, to study, and to expound the Law of Moses: but to this they had superadded many traditions of their Fathers, to which they ascribed nearly the same authority as to their written law. Thus they acted as Interpreters of the Law in both its branches of civil and religious economy, sometimes expounding it in their Councils, and sometimes teaching it in their Synagogues. SERM. III.

3. The administration of justice was committed to a Council of Elders. When the Children of Israel came out of Egypt, the whole direction of the State, whether ministerial or judicial, was in the hands of Moses. But on the prudent counsel of Jethro, who observed that he had a greater charge upon him than he could long sustain, he chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands and rulers of hundreds and rulers of fifties and rulers of tens: and they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter

SERM. III. matter they judged themselves[f]. Notwithstanding this relief, he had soon occasion to complain, that the charge which he still reserved was too great a burden for one man to support. Hereupon he was directed by God himself to chuse seventy Elders out of the people to assist him in the government[g]. To the first of these appointments we may ascribe the origin of the rural or provincial Elders, who were dispersed in their several orders through the Tribes and Cities of Israel: and to the second we may refer the origin of the chief or national Council of Elders, which was stationed in Jerusalem, and not only judged in more important concerns, but also received appeals from all subordinate or provincial Councils. In this superior Court we may trace the Institution, more distinctly known after the return from the Babylonian bondage, of the Sanhedrim or Council of Elders, in whom was invested a great portion both of the Civil and the Criminal Justice of the Jews, while they had Princes of their own: and when they were fallen under

[f] Exod. xviii. 25, 26. [g] Numb. xi. 16, &c.

the

the dominion of the Romans, though their authority was abridged in the administration of Criminal justice, they were left in possession of their ancient Civil jurisdiction. SERM. III.

During the Maccabean government there arose the two opposite Sects of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.—The Pharisees were distinguished or separated from the common people, as the term implies in their original tongue, by an extraordinary zeal for the Law of Moses, as also for the Traditions of their Fathers, to which they ascribed almost as implicit an authority as to the Law itself. And this zeal they affected to display by a scrupulous and ostentatious attention to the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic worship. Hence we find them so exact in their ablutions, and so punctual in their payment of tithes, even of the most common herbs. Thus in the exteriors of their duty they were always very strict. Yet according to the character, which they bear in the gospel, they were far from possessing the essentials of religion: they gave alms without charity, they made long prayers without devotion, and they fasted without contrition and repentance. While

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punctual in giving tithes, they forgot the claims of judgement, mercy, and faith: while they had the form of godliness, they denied the power thereof; and while they yielded the homage of the body, they neglected the sacrifice of the heart.

The Sadducees differed from them in some of the more important articles of faith. They disclaimed all traditional and oral law. And though they paid some deference to the book of Psalms and to the Prophets, yet they limited the divine authority of the scriptures to the books of Moses. In thus rejecting so considerable a portion of holy writ, they also rejected some of the essential articles of scriptural revelation. For not finding in the scriptures, which they acknowledged, any positive assertion of a future state, or a state of separate existence for the departed soul, they said there was no Resurrection, neither Angel, nor Spirit. When they were thus lax in their principles, we need not wonder that they were also loose in their practice. The Sect however was comparatively small, though it gained some weight from the quality of its members, as it comprehended

hended several of the most powerful and opulent among the people. SERM. III.

Such were the different Orders, Professions, or Sects among the Jews, as they appeared in our Saviour's day, and as they are frequently mentioned in the gospel History. From the united evidence of all the Evangelists we may collect this general feature of their character, still more predominant in those of superior rank and opulence and authority, that while they encouraged a presumptuous opinion of themselves, they also entertained an uncharitable sentiment of others. Not contented with regarding the whole Heathen world as out of the pale of God's promises and abandoned of the care and grace of heaven, they contracted their charity within a still narrower compass than their own civil polity or profession of faith. For we find them too ready to treat with contempt and neglect the poorer orders of the people, particularly such as they supposed deficient in the observances of the Law. All such they opprobriously distinguished by the name of Sinners: and instead of being guides to the blind and instructors of the ignorant, as they professed themselves to be, they shut

SERM. III. the kingdom of heaven against them, and would hardly admit them to the common privileges of Israel. One maxim of theirs, which the gospel notices, is a sufficient mark of their uncharitable sentiment, *This people, who know not the law, are cursed* [c].

But this contemptuous disregard of the common people was heightened into hatred toward such among them, as in any shape gave a countenance to a foreign authority. The encroachment of the Romans was obnoxious to all the Jews, who considered freedom and independence as essentials of their inheritance in the land of promise: but it was more especially grating to the Pharisees and Scribes, the Chief Priests and Elders, because it abridged them of that consequence which they derived from their rank or station in society. Though they could not deny, yet they were most reluctant to acknowledge, that they were in bondage to any man. Yet this unwelcome truth continually annoyed them both in their avarice and their ambition, when they were called upon to render tribute unto Cesar. To col-

[c] John vii. 49.

lect

lect this tribute was the office of the Publicans. The nature of their office made them odious to the Pharisees; and being contemptuously treated by their own Countrymen they might become less attached to the institutions of their Country. Hence by the Pharisees, always ready to aggravate whatever was reprehensible in their character, they were regarded as apostates both from their country and religion, they were classed with Heathens, and accounted reprobate. SERM. III.

The same kind of hatred they extended to a People in their neighbourhood, who made some pretensions in common with them to the covenant of promise, though they were neither pure in their descent from Abraham, nor correct in their observance of the Mosaic Law. When the King of Assyria had removed the ten Tribes of Israel to a distant exile, he supplied their place in the land of Palestine by a Colony of promiscuous people from some remote provinces of his kingdoms, who from the chief Town of their new Country were called Samaritans. They here became incorporated with the remains of the people, whom the Assyrians had left;

SERM. III. and from them they adopted the Law and Ritual of Moses, which however they corrupted by a mixture of their ancient heathen superstitions and idolatries. Thus rivals to the Jews they soon became their enemies. They obstructed them on their return from Babylon in rebuilding their Temple and re-establishing their State. And they aggravated this offence in later times by building a Temple of their own in opposition to that of Jerusalem. A continuance of reciprocal provocations produced an inveterate enmity between them; all intercourse of commerce and good offices was set aside; and hence the gospel records it as an established maxim, that *the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans*[f],

THIS outline of the Jewish history, and of the several distinctions under which the Jews are mentioned in the gospel, will prepare us to understand the dispositions of those who came to hear our Lord, and also to conceive the peculiar aim of that instruction,

[f] John iv. 9.

which

which he severally addressed to the various characters of his Hearers. SERM. III.

The general complexion of his discourse was to preach the gospel to the poor, and to offer mercy to the penitent. His company and conversation would therefore be highly acceptable to persons of that description; the more so perhaps, because they were so very different from the manner of their professional Instructors. Thus we are told, that the common people heard him gladly [g]. To them he freely spoke in a gracious and conciliating tone. And though he found them incompetent to receive the mysteries of divine knowledge, yet he readily imparted what was necessary to their spiritual peace. Thus also we are told, that the Publicans and Sinners drew near for to hear him [h]. To them he also spoke in a strain of compassion and consolation. While he shewed them the full guilt of their transgressions, yet he would not overwhelm them with severe denunciations of divine wrath. As a good Physician of the soul he sought by friendly counsel to correct the errors of their past lives, to bring them to

[g] Mark xii. 37. [h] Luke xvi. 1.

SERM. III. repentance, and to reconcile them to God.

Yet welcome as his language was to these, it was totally repugnant to the sentiments and doctrine of the superior orders, especially the Pharisees and Scribes; who boasted of their own knowledge and trusted in their own righteousness, but were not at all disposed to impart instruction to the poor or consolation to the penitent. Hence whenever they came to hear him, they came not with any view of deriving instruction or edification to themselves, being abundantly satisfied with their own attainments, but with a captious intent of finding fault with the Teacher. Thus we see their disposition to take offence, when they murmured at his conduct in receiving sinners and eating with them. When therefore he applied his discourse to them, though in the manner of his language he was very mild, yet in the substance of his doctrine he was most severe. He exposed the vanity of their pretensions to superior righteousness, and he taught them that a formal observance of the law was of no account in heaven, without a surrender of the heart in vital piety to

to God and charity to their fellow-creatures. SERM. III.

The design, which he thus pursued in all his discourse to the different characters and orders of his Hearers, is most conspicuous in his Parables. According to the opinion which he formed of their several dispositions has he chosen to represent their several characters in his imaginary narratives. For it cannot escape our observation, that in the several parables, which place in opposition men of many talents and men of few, men of great endowments and men of small, whether in station, fortune, or understanding, the advantage in the spiritual life is usually given to those, who seem to be favoured least in external qualities and endowments.

A Pharisee and a Publican go up into the temple to pray. The Pharisee recounts all his self-imputed virtues, and presumptuously thanks God that he is not as other men are, or even as that Publican: while the Publican standing afar off would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smites upon his breast, saying, *God be merciful to me a Sinner!* Yet our Saviour tells us, *This*

SERM. III. *man went down to his house justified rather than the other*[i].

A Priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan encounter severally on the road with a way-faring man, who had been stript and wounded and left half-dead by thieves. The Priest and the Levite after looking on him pass by on the other side: but the Samaritan no sooner saw him than he had compassion on him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. While these two Ministers of God are tacitly disapproved, this charitable Alien is proposed for an example even to a Teacher of the law; *Go and do thou likewise*[k].

A Rich man is clothed in purple and fine linen and fareth sumptuously every day: while a Poor man is laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fall from the Rich man's table. Yet their destinies in another world are thus reported by the Patriarch Abraham in his answer to the suit of the Rich man; *Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy*

[i] Luke xviii. 10, &c. [k] Luke x. 30, &c.

good

good things, and likewise Lazarus his evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented[1]. SERM. III.

Our reason might incline us to expect from those of superior endowments this principle of justice, this testimony of gratitude towards the divine Donor, that the more they have received, the more they be solicitous to return. But a slight experience in the ways of men will suffice to teach us, that their justice and gratitude seldom rise in proportion to the benefits conferred upon them. Our Lord, who knew what was in man, appears to have looked with most complacence on those, who occupied the lowest rank in station, fortune, or understanding. And in his imaginary narratives he has placed the least endowed in the most advantageous point of view.

But lest we should suppose that he shewed a greater favour to the poor and humbler ranks of men on any other account, than as they were better disposed for the reception and cultivation of religious truth, we are supplied with one case altogether opposite in the pa-

[1] Luke xvi. 19, &c.

rable

SERM. III.

rable of the Talents which a certain Householder committed to his Servants; the result of which was this, that they, who had received a larger stock of Talents, or were more liberally gifted with the endowments of Providence, made a due improvement of their several gifts, and accordingly received a proportionate reward; while he, who had received only one Talent, or was but slenderly gifted with the endowments of Providence, neglected altogether to turn it to any use, and was therefore condemned as a faithless and unprofitable Servant[m].

Such is the special application of our Saviour's parables. They have a direct and immediate reference to the people to whom he spoke and to the age in which he came into the world.

But we must not rest in this limited application as the full and final purpose, for which they were delivered. The providence of God, by committing them to record in his written word, has undoubtedly designed them for lessons of universal and perpetual use.

[m] Matt. xxv. 14, &c.

While

While therefore they point at particular characters and distinctions of men in a certain country or a certain age, they may also be accepted and applied as lessons of practical instruction in every country and in every age. SERM. III.

To take an example from the parable of the Sower[n]: while in its primary sense it represents the Author of our holy faith disseminating the word of God among the people of Israel, it also in a more general and comprehensive acceptation represents every diligent Minister of the Gospel in the Church of Christ dispensing the same word in the sphere of his respective ministry.

To take another instance from the parable of the Father who had two Sons of oppdsite dispositions and characters[o]: while the case of the Younger Son in the primary design is an image of the Publicans and Sinners, who drew near for to hear him; it extends this encouragement and consolation to all other Sinners, that if they will forsake their evil ways and turn unto the Lord in contrition and penitence, he will accept them as children, will pardon

[n] Matt. xiii. 3, &c. [o] Luke xv. 10, &c.

their

SERM. III. their transgressions, and receive them again to his favour and affection. And again, while the case of the Elder Son is an image of the Pharisees and Scribes, who murmured at his conduct in receiving sinners and eating with them, it equally extends a caution to all such Christians as have hitherto walked in the better way, that they neither presume on their own merits, nor look with want of charity on others, who may seem to be inferior to themselves either in the knowledge or the practice of religion.

Even those parables, which appear to be more closely restricted to the Jews, may be converted into lessons of comprehensive use. Thus the parable of the Lord, who planted a vineyard and let it out to Husbandmen, expressly represents the economy of God in establishing a church and consigning it to the care of the House of Israel [p]. Therein we see pourtrayed his indulgence to the chosen race, his frequent claims upon them for the fruits of their services, their ingratitude and guilt in their treatment of his Prophets, the

[p] Matt. xxi. 33, &c.

com-

completion of their iniquities in the death of his dear Son, and that avenging justice which would afterwards overwhelm them in the destruction of Jerusalem and the total overthrow of their establishment as a nation. Now though the interpretation is limited to the Jews, it extends this exemplary caution to all the Gentiles, who are admitted on their default and rejection into the Covenant of grace, as they would avert the wrath and indignation of Almighty God, that they respect his calls in his Word and by his Ministers, and render him in season the fruits of their service. SERM. III.

Considered in this point of view the parables will be found to comprehend an extensive range of instruction in the various conditions and relations of human life. We therefore cannot study them to greater advantage, than by applying them carefully to the regulation of our faith, and the correction and improvement of our practice.

For it deserves our notice, that the parables have a regard at once to the doctrines and to the duties of a Christian. While they inform us in the principles of divine economy in assigning

SERM. III. ing to different men different measures and degrees of talents and endowments, they instruct us to improve our respective portions to the glory of God, the benefit of mankind, and the salvation of our own souls. While they display the mercies of God to the penitent and contrite, and his favour to the faithful and obedient, they encourage us to repentance of our sins, and to perseverance in a faithful service. While they represent that strict account, which God will hereafter make, and that certain recompence, which he will render to all according to their works, they inculcate on our hearts a continual preparation for that aweful day, by forsaking all our sins and by observing all his commandments.

Thus the Parables, in common with all other scriptures, are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus: and thus are they profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works [q].

[q] 2 Tim. iii. 15, &c.

If

If therefore we would either hear or read them to any good and useful purpose, let us study to bring them home, not merely to our understandings, but also to our hearts and lives: let us cordially embrace the doctrines they impart, and vigorously put in practice the duties they recommend. So shall we receive them as spoken, not only to the Disciples, but even unto all; and so shall we comply with the spirit of our Lord's admonition, *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

SERMON IV.

THE SOWER.

MATTHEW XIII. 3.

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying; Behold a Sower went forth to sow.

IT is recorded of Jesus in the opening of his mission, that he *went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people*[a]. The fame of his doctrines and miracles combined drew continually a throng around him. And the people pressed upon him, not only in the more public resorts of the streets or the synagogues, but they also followed him into the re- SERM. IV.

[a] Matt. iv. 23.

SERM. IV. tirements of a mountain or a wilderness. One day, in which he had found a more than ordinary call for the exercise of his prophetic character, he went out of the house and sate by the Sea or Lake of Gennesaret. But here he had no long respite from his labours: great multitudes were gathered unto him: and that he might avoid the press, as also might address them with greater advantage of being heard, he entered into a ship, and sate, while the whole multitude stood on the shore.

Though the people shewed no want of reverence to his person and ministry, though they held him as a Prophet, and listened to his word as an embassy from heaven, they retained notwithstanding many carnal and worldly prejudices, which betrayed them into mistaken notions both of his character and mission, and impaired the good effect of all his conversation.

This sentiment our Saviour seems to have entertained, when he opened his discourse with the parable of the Sower.

Behold a Sower went forth to sow. The seeds which he sowed were good, but the success of their growth depended on the

the qualities of the ground on which they were received. *Some fell by the way side:* this ground could supply neither nutriment nor security: *they were trodden down by the feet of men, and the fowls of the air came and devoured them up. And some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth;* sufficient indeed to make them spring up speedily, but not to afford more beneficial nurture: *they forthwith sprang up, because they had no depth of earth: but when the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they wanted root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns:* here indeed the soil was suitable for nutriment; but it was cumbered with other produce: for *when the thorns sprang up, they were choked.* All these kinds of ground were inefficient! Though they varied in their qualities of nurture, yet they all equally failed of bringing fruit to maturity. *But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit* in several degrees of increase, *some a hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold.* SERM. IV.

Such is the parable of the Sower going forth to sow. As it stands the first in order, so it seems to be rated the first in importance. For this together

SERM. IV. the Interpretation is recorded by three Evangelists[b]. And our Lord has attached some weight to the doctrine it conveys by calling thus upon the attention of his audience, *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

The parable was adapted to the observation and experience of the multitude. And if they had duly considered its design, they might have discovered, that it was an image of their own dispositions and characters in the reception of the gospel. Yet by reason of prejudice or want of thought it seems to have made but little impression on their hearts. As our Lord applies the words of Isaiah, *they saw, but did not perceive; they heard, but did not understand.* The Disciples attended with better dispositions to receive and entertain the word: and therefore when they were apart he gave them his own interpretation of the parable, which is left on record in the gospel for the general instruction of all future Disciples. From this we learn, that the Sower is the Preacher of the word, the Seed is the Word itself, the different grounds on which it fell are

[b] Mat. xiii. 3. Mark 3. Luke viii. 4.

the

the different dispositions of his hearers to receive it. SERM. IV.

Now the Sower, in the primary design of this similitude, is our Lord himself. Though never man spake like him, his hearers had all the frailties of human nature: and though the people heard him gladly, yet they did not pay so serious an attention to his word, as to fix it in their hearts, and to make it the invariable guide of their lives.

Among those who heard the word there were some who are said to understand it not; because they did not understand it to any good effect. It amused them for the moment as a new thing; and perhaps at the time they might fancy themselves to be edified with the doctrine. But so slight was the impression, that they soon left occasion for the Tempter to steal away what was sown in their hearts, and to render them unfruitful. These were the seed that fell by the way-side.

There were others, who attended with better dispositions. They received the word with joy: yet they had no root in themselves, and dured only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution rose because of the word, by and by

SERM. IV. they were offended. Thus though they believed for a time, yet in the hour of temptation they fell away. These were the seed that fell in stony places.

Others also there were, who attended to the word for a season, and then went forth upon their worldly business; when the word which they professed was choked by the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of this life. Thus the seed of heavenly truth had not sufficient room to vegetate; and therefore it could bring no fruit to perfection. These were the seed that fell among thorns.

Yet some there still remained, to whom our Saviour did not preach in vain; who heard and understood the word, received it in an honest and good heart, and brought forth fruit with patience. These were the seed that fell on good ground; and thus, according to their several talents and capacities, they bore increase, some a hundred fold, and some sixty fold, and some thirty fold.

This last kind of ground represented the character of our Saviour's true Disciples. While other hearers drooped or faultered in their attention, these continued

tinued firm and steady to the word. Convinced that Jesus was the very Christ, who was come both to illuminate and to save the world, they attached themselves to his person, they trusted in his merits, they obeyed his precepts; they relinquished all for him, they took up his cross and followed him in suffering, and they continued faithful to the last. SERM. IV.

The Sower also represents any Preacher of the word among the Apostles and other primitive Disciples of Christ; who went abroad into the world to disseminate that gospel which was committed to their charge. Like him whom they served they discovered the same varieties of disposition among their Hearers, and they consequently found the same variety of success in their preaching. Whatever region of the world was the scene of their labours, the growth of religion was repeatedly obstructed, in some by the vanities, in others by the troubles, and again in others by the cares of life. Yet some there still remained, in whom their doctrine found an easy reception and a ready growth; who received the word in

SERM. IV. in their hearts, and brought forth fruit in the tenour of their lives.

These primitive Sowers of the word had various impediments to surmount in their spiritual husbandry. The ground on which they sowed might be regarded as a drear and rugged waste, which had never yet been broken up by the labours of the Husbandman. In the commencement of their toils they found a rock of offence in the prejudice of the Jews, who could not be reconciled to the notion of a Messiah coming in the form and circumstance of humility. And when the partition wall was broken down between the Jew and the Gentile, and the benefit of the heavenly seed was extended over the common field of the world, they found another impediment in the proud philosophy of the Greeks, which was equally at variance with the doctrine of a crucified Redeemer. Thus the Gospel was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness[c]. To counteract these impediments to its promulgation in the world, God was pleased to endow its first Ministers with extraordinary gifts; which equally served for a sup-

[c] 1 Cor. i. 23.

port

port to themselves under trials of every kind, and for an assurance to others that their doctrine was of God. SERM. IV.

Again, The Sower has a fuller and more extensive application to all other Teachers in the Church of Christ, and may be brought home with advantage to the Ministers of the present day. Our case indeed is in some respects very different from that of the primitive Disciples. We have neither such obstacles on the one side, neither have we such extraordinary support on the other. Since the Religion of Christ is established in the land, the ground appointed for the exercise of our labours is in some degree prepared for an easier cultivation. But though we have not to contend either with Jewish prejudice or with Gentile pride, we have still to combat with the passions and propensities of human nature, which always have been, and always will remain, incumbrances to the growth and culture of true and vital religion in the soul of man.

Yet in spite of all discouragements, that continually must arise from those diversities of character which prevail among mankind, it is the part of every Christian

SERM. IV. Christian Minister, after the example of him whom he professes to serve, to give all his diligence and industry to the task he has undertaken, to persevere in his labours with unremitting patience, and even to increase his efforts in proportion to the difficulties that rise before him. If he is not endowed with such extraordinary powers in support of his doctrine, as were vouchsafed in primitive times, he is encouraged to repair to the throne of grace for help to illuminate his studies of the divine word, and to bestow a blessing on his spiritual labours. Supported by the promise made by Christ, that our heavenly Father will give his holy Spirit to them that ask it, he will persevere in his pious efforts, in this assurance of faith, that though the hallowed seed may have no perceptible growth, yet the Lord of the spiritual field will not disregard his plant: the dew of heavenly grace, insensibly diffused upon it, will give it nurture and promote its increase.

But while a duty rests upon the Preacher of the word, a corresponding duty also rests upon the Hearer. When the Preacher is doing his part for the correction and improvement of the people

ple committed to his charge, it is at the same time incumbent on the people to give all their faculties of attention and application to the doctrine he inculcates, agreeably to that instructive call with which our Saviour closes this similitude, *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.* SERM. IV.

Now that we may improve the instruction which the parable conveys, it may be useful to examine the various characters and dispositions of our Hearers, as we find them represented by these various qualities of soil; and according to their several cases to apply some arguments of exhortation; in order to engage a more profitable attention in those, who have hitherto attended to little or no good purpose, and to encourage a perseverance of regard in those, who have cordially understood the word, and brought forth fruit with patience.

1. By the ground on the way side we may understand that numerous class of Hearers in the present day, who regularly resort to the service of the Church, and listen for the time to the word of God whether read or interpreted:

SERM. IV. terpreted: but not having set their hearts upon religious exercises, they regard it only as an habitual round of duty, to be performed in certain order and at certain hours. Hence while they yield their ears, they do not also give their minds and their memories; and therefore they are said to understand it not. As long as they attend with regularity and decorum, they are willing to believe that by such a conduct they are fulfilling all righteousness: but as soon as they have left the house of public worship, they revert to their secular occupations and amusements as to their principal and indeed their sole concern: and all further thought of God and religion is laid aside, till the recurrence of another Sabbath calls them to their weekly round of nominal attention. No wonder then that the word has so little impression upon them, and that in their hurry after things which have more engaged their thoughts, the Tempter should steal into their hearts, and catch away the good seed that was sown therein.

This indifference to the first and truest interest of man ought to be guarded against as the extravagance of folly. We are all disposed to pity and condemn

demn that man, who trifles in his temporal calling, and neglects the business, which would procure him the competences of life, in the pursuit of unmeaning vanities and amusements. But incomparably more pitiable is the folly of those men, who trifle in their spiritual calling, and neglect that great concern, which would promote the eternal welfare of their souls, for the vain and unprofitable devices of the world. SERM. IV.

Now the more they submit to delusion in this matter, and the more they surrender themselves to the temptations of the wicked, the greater is their need for those mementos of another life, which the word of God supplies. And therefore they should be seriously taught again and again, till some impression is made, not only on their understandings, but also on their hearts, that the word which they profess to hear proposes to their diligent pursuit a prize of inestimable value, which however is not attainable by an idle wish or barren prayer, but is only to be won by assiduous endeavour; that the religion of Christ, whom they profess to serve, is not the occasional claim of a certain day in the week or a certain hour of the day, but

SERM. IV. is the first vocation of man, the one thing needful in his pilgrimage of life; that it is incumbent upon all men, whatever their advances have in their own opinion already been, that they work out their salvation with fear and trembling; that nothing but a diligent application to this first concern on earth will secure their establishment in heaven; and that the practice or neglect of this in time will determine the success or failure of their souls to all eternity.

To incite a more serious attention to the state of their souls, let them look to the conduct of the Apostles; who duly appreciating the heavenly word neither grudged any labours, nor shrunk from any dangers, whether in obeying it themselves, or in preaching it to an idolatrous and irreligious world. Let them look to the behaviour of him, in whom they profess to believe; who was patient and unwearied in fulfilling all righteousness, whose meat was to do the will of him that sent him and to finish his work[d]. And now that he has accomplished that important work for which he came into the world, in

[d] John iv. 34.

turning

turning us from darkness unto light and from the power of Satan unto God, he is gone into heaven to prepare a place for those, and those only, who take his precept for a rule and his example for a guide. SERM. IV.

II. By the stony ground we may understand another class of men, who eagerly receive the word at first, but faulter in their zeal, as soon as they encounter any difficulties in reducing it to practice.

The character indeed applies more closely to the primitive age of the Church, when men were much exposed to persecutions and tribulations on account of the word. But it may also be proved amid those trials, which may befal us even in a more peaceful and settled state. For though in the present hour men may boldly avow their faith without any hazard of those calamities, by which the primitive Christians were tried, yet they must not hope to pass through the world without any conflicts in their way. Though they are not put upon any fiery trial, yet they must not expect that the pilgrimage of life will be continually calm

SERM. IV. and smooth, and that all their days will pass without a cloud. We are not exempt from trials in the common walks of life; but they steal upon us in a more alluring form. If we are not exposed to the assaults of undisguised and real evil, we are liable to the blandishments of specious and apparent good. And it is thought by some to be no inferior fortitude to resist the insidious allurements of prosperous fortune, than the rude attacks of tribulation and calamity. If we are not called with the first Disciples to wrestle with flesh and blood [e], we have to exercise a continual vigilance in controlling those passions within us which war against the soul [f].

Under this description therefore must be understood those Hearers of the word, who though they profess a zeal for Christ and his religion, are not able to resist the manners and fashions of a corrupted world when they deviate from the Christian character, and thus are unhappily brought to surrender themselves to undue compliances; who through fear of giving offence to the worldly mind or of provoking the ridi-

[e] Eph. vi. 12. [f] 1 Pet. ii. 11.

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cule of the scorner are diverted or deterred from the practice, from the avowal, from the vindication of the faith; or through want of courage to resist the insinuations or the taunts of vicious men are induced in spite of knowledge to follow a multitude to do evil. SERM. IV.

When men are thus disposed to faulter in their Christian course, they are earnestly to be taught, that upon enlisting themselves under the banners of Christ they have engaged in an arduous enterprize, which requires their utmost zeal and courage and perseverance; they are repeatedly to be admonished, that they never shrink from their spiritual warfare here, if they would partake in the triumph of their spiritual Chief hereafter. In support of this resolution it behoves them to attend to that solemn warning which our Saviour gave, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy Angels*[g]. In order to fight the good fight of faith they

[g] Mark viii. 38.

TERM. IV. must take unto themselves the whole armour of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication of the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance[h]. They must be firm in defiance of seducing words and in opposition to bad example. The less they are now exposed to tribulation on account of their faith, surely the less excuseable they are, if they do not firmly avow it and constantly maintain it. If they are not able to attain that pitch of fortitude, which might enable them to contend for the crown of martyrdom, they should however labour for that stability of principle, which amid the ordinary conflicts with the world may keep them upright in the service of the Lord.

To encourage a more vigorous resolution let them regard the example of the Apostles, who animated with the love of Christ and inspired with the hope of his promised recompence, went forth in the power of his might into an adverse world, every where preaching the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, making light of every danger and of every toil, and courageously striving

[h] Eph. vi. 12.

with

with all the malice of their enemies.— Let them regard the example of their blessed Lord, who freely gave himself to sorrow, shame, and death on their account. Can they scruple to partake some sorrow with him, which will finally be turned into joy? Can they ever be ashamed of him when he points the way to glory? Can they grudge to die unto sin and to crucify for him all inordinate affection, when this will lead them to eternal life? SERM. IV.

III. By the thorny ground is described another numerous class of Hearers, who punctually resort to the Christian sanctuary, and seem to others, and even to themselves, to pay a strict attention and reverence to the word, yet suffer earthly things to possess their principal regard; who, while they aspire to the inheritance of heaven, are cumbered with the many cares of life, and while they breathe a wish for the freedom of the spiritual state, become entangled with the bondage of the world.

It is seriously to be lamented as too general a truth, that the more men have received of the good things of Providence, the less they are disposed to pay

SERM. IV. their gratitude in return: they forget the Giver in contemplating the gift. Hence the love of riches is called in scripture, *Idolatry;* and hence it is the tenour of scriptural exhortation to detach us from the love of riches as from the worship of idols[1].

That men may be drawn from too intent an affection for earthly things, it becomes expedient that they view them in comparison with heavenly things. And here indeed they sink in value beyond all estimate or calculation. All the profits and all the losses of this world are of no account when put in competition with the goods and evils of the world to come. If we have all in this life which the most inordinate avarice or ambition could desire, yet both the attainment and the possession are qualified with many cares, they are of doubtful issue, they are of uncertain tenure, and they are very dearly purchased if they contribute in any degree to hinder or to retard our progress to that heavenly land. For *what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and*

[1] Col. iii. 5.

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lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul[k]*?* SERM. IV.

Indeed so gracious is God in his ordinary dealings with mankind, that he has in some measure linked our temporal interest with our spiritual duty; so that in diligently performing our several functions in that state of life in which God has placed us, in providing for our own household, and in promoting the welfare of the whole community, we execute a part of our religious duty. But nevertheless a caution will be always useful to this description of hearers, that they do not cultivate their temporal to the prejudice of their eternal good; that they do not so intently fix their hearts on earthly things, as to weaken or impair their zeal for heavenly things; that while they attend to their worldly business, and perform the part which Providence allots them in society, they do not overlook that more important business of human life for which they were called into the world. To the end that they may use the world without abusing it, it is expedient for them to sanctify that share of wealth which God has given

[k] Matt. xvi. 26.

SERM. IV. them by a grateful heart and a pious and honest application. While they are careful to return their thanks to God, for sending a blessing upon their honest endeavours and supplying the comforts and conveniences of life in abundance, they are to use them with moderation and temperance themselves; and they are to study the most effectual means of making them conducive to the temporal and eternal interest of their fellow-creatures.

To imprint these reflexions more sensibly upon their minds, let them view the demeanour of the primitive Disciples, when the state of the Church required of its professors, not the use, but the sacrifice of all worldly goods. For the sake of Christ and his religion they made no scruple to abandon houses and lands and kindred and country; they relinquished every comfort, they submitted to every loss; supported by the promise of that word which could not fail, that what they sacrificed on earth should be abundantly repaid in heaven.—Let them view the behaviour of their blessed Lord; though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor; though he sate on a throne of glory,

glory, yet he submitted to a state of ig- SERM.
nominy; though he was the Heir of all, IV.
yet he had not where to lay his head.
To all these evils, as the world esteems them, he was cheerfully resigned on our account. He mourned, that we might be comforted; he hungered, that we might be satisfied; he was destitute of every worldly good, that through his poverty we might be rich.

IV. LASTLY, By the good ground are signified those good and honest Hearers, who really understand the word; that is, who do not content themselves with giving it their ears or their momentary attention, but implant it in their memories and impress it on their hearts; who retain it as the guide of their conduct in all situations of human fortune, who neither diverted by the vanities, nor alarmed by the troubles, nor discomposed by the cares of life, persevere with patience in a religious course, and bring forth fruit according to the measure of their several talents and capacities.

To this kind of Hearers the exhortation to be offered is, that they still maintain a steady perseverance in the way

SERM. IV. way they have chosen. For so frail is human nature even in those, who have made some advance in righteousness, and so powerful are the temptations, to which the most perfect are exposed in this life, that men have need of every caution and circumspection to continue stedfast in that course which they have well begun. If we would ensure the high prize of our calling, we must never stop or faulter in a virtuous course, we must never rest satisfied in having attained any certain degree of righteousness. Let us climb as far as we are able, we are at a vast distance from those heights of virtue, after which we are enjoined to strive. Should we once allow ourselves to pause in our Christian race, on a presumption that we have already advanced as far as is necessary to secure our final peace, we risk the loss of that divine grace which before enabled us to grow in goodness, and we incur a hazard of receding from that pitch of righteousness which has hitherto been the object of our serious application. It is the tenour of religious instruction that we increase more and more. Whatever advance we have already made, we are to *grow in grace and*

and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ[l]: remembering always the caution which our Lord has given us, that *no man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God*[m]. SERM. IV.

It must not be dissembled that amid the several frailties of our nature our utmost endeavours must fall far short of that perfection in righteousness to which we are admonished to aspire; nay so poor and defective is the service of the best, that notwithstanding all their cares they are apt to fall into frequent errors, and with all their industry they are but unprofitable servants. Yet if they devoutly supplicate the grace of God for aid, and apply their constant diligence to concur with this divine Visitant in all religious exercises, they are assured of every necessary support and assistance through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ. And moreover to encourage their persevering diligence, this gracious promise is extended to them in the gospel, that according to their progress here in grace will their advancement hereafter be in glory. They shall

[l] 2 Pet. iii, 18. [m] Luke ix. 62.

bring

MATT. XIII. 23. *bring forth fruit, some a hundred fold, and some sixty fold, and some thirty fold.*

For though these words in their strict intention signify the various degrees of righteousness which men may attain, according to the various measures of grace which God may yield; yet they seem also to intimate this doctrine, which is more directly testified in other parts of the gospel, that the higher degree of holiness men attain on earth, the fuller measure of happiness shall they receive in heaven.

When such is the method of divine justice of apportioning rewards in another state, when to superior service in the present life is attached a superior recompence in the life to come, what encouragement is this to such as have habituated themselves to the ways of righteousness, that they continue stedfast and unmoveable in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they know that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord[n]!

To encourage us to perseverance and continual growth in grace we may look to the example of the Apostles and first

[n] 1 Cor. xv. 58.

Disciples

Disciples of Christ, who after they had long been exercised in the labours of their spiritual calling, never slackened or abated in their diligence and zeal, but continued advancing to the end of their lives, though nothing but dangers and difficulties were before them. In the conduct of the Apostle Paul we behold a representation of that of all his Brethren. To the Elders of Ephesus he declared, that while he had been among them he served the Lord with all humility and with many tears and temptations, which befel him by the lying in wait of the Jews. *And now*, continues he, *behold I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befal me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God*[*].

SERM. IV.

Yet with all this patient and strenuous application to his Christian ministry he makes this profession to the Philippians;

[*] Acts xx. 17, &c.

Not

SERM. IV. *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect. But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that, for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* [p]. And the hope of this prize it was, which led him to exclaim in this animated and solemn strain; *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or the sword? —Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us* [q].

Hence when the time of his departure was at hand, and he was now ready to be offered up in martyrdom for the cause of Christ, he was supported at the approach of this last great conflict by a hope, which the divine Spirit had ripened into confidence; *I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,*

[p] Phil. iii. 12, &c. [q] Rom. viii. 35, &c.

which

which the Lord the righteous Judge will give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also who love his appearing [r].

SERM. IV.

And while we contemplate the Apostles as patterns of perseverance in their spiritual task, let us also fix our regard on him, to whom they also looked as a pattern of exemplary conduct, namely to the Son of God, who like a wise Instructor has illustrated his precepts by his example.

If he has required us to be of humble and gentle dispositions, this amiable character is delineated in himself, *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart* [s]. If he has required us to be pure both in body and soul, he was himself a Lamb without spot or blemish, holy and acceptable to God [t]. If he has taught us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and all our strength, he has himself expressed this love in a life continually devoted to his Father's will. If he has taught us to love our neighbour as ourselves, this love he hath equally expressed both in his life and

[r] 2 Tim. iv. 6, &c [s] Matt. xi. 29.
[t] 1 Pet. i. 19.

in

SERM. II. in his death: in order to promote our peace he submitted to a life of poverty and toil, to a death of ignominy and pain. Though being invested in glory, and being in the form of God, yet for our sakes he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man: *Wherefore*, continues the Apostle, *God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father* [u].

Seeing therefore we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses in the Apostles and other primitive Christians, let us lay aside every weight, which we may happen to experience from the vanities, the troubles, and the cares this world; let us more especially lay aside the sin, that most easily besets us, whether from habit or constitution or circumstance of life; and let us run with patience the race that is set before

[u] Phil. ii. 6, &c.

us.—But principally let us look unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith,—the Author, as he has prescribed a course of duty to be done, and the Finisher, as he has provided a recompence for our faithful service; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God [x]. Here elevated in glory he still benignantly prosecutes that work for which he came into the world. For as he once hath given us a rule and pattern how we ought to walk, so he still continues to supply us with his holy Spirit, to assist and support us in the way of righteousness: as he once became a propitiatory sacrifice for us upon earth, so also now on the merit of that sacrifice he is become our prevailing Intercessor and Advocate in heaven. Thus the work which he once undertook in the likeness of men, he continues to carry on in the form of God. Still faithful to that design of grace for which he came into the world, he perseveres in raising us from the human character to the divine, in ad-

SERM. IV.

[x] Heb. xii. 1, 2.

SERM. IV. vancing us from an earthly habitation to a heavenly. For all, who truly understand his word and bring forth fruit with patience, he is gone to prepare a place, that where he is they may be also [y].

[y] John xiv 2, 3.

SERMON

SERMON V.

THE TARES AMONG THE WHEAT.

MATT. XIII. 24, 25.

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a Man who sowed good Seed in his Field. But while Men slept, his Enemy came and sowed Tares among the Wheat; and went his way.

IT was the usage of our blessed Lord in discoursing to the people to draw his allusions from the scenery then in view, and to adapt his comparisons to the observation and experience of the people then in hearing. Thus when he discoursed in a series of parables from a ship, in sight lay the country, at the season of approaching harvest, as we learn from the circumstance recorded in the foregoing chapter, of his Disciples

SERM. V.

SERM. V. plucking the ears of corn[a]: and before him on the shore was a multitude of people, collected chiefly, we have reason to think, from the walks of rural life. Hence with an eye both to the nature of the scene and the condition of his audience he begins his discourse with the parable of the Sower going forth to sow, and he continues the same vein of similitude in that of the Tares which grew among the Wheat.

The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a Man who sowed good Seed in his Field. But while men slept, his Enemy came and sowed Tares among the Wheat; and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the Tares also. So the Servants of the Householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An Enemy hath done this. The Servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the Tares, ye root up also the Wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will

[a] Mat. xii. 1.

say

say to the Reapers, Gather ye together first the Tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the Wheat into my barn. SERM. V.

To this as well as the former parable an interpretation is provided by our Lord himself. For as soon as he had sent the multitude away, and was gone into the house, his Disciples came to him, saying, *Declare unto us the parable of the Tares in the field.* The answer which he gave hereupon to them is left on record in the gospel for a standing instruction to the Christian Church.

He that soweth the good seed is the same with the Sower in the preceding parable, namely the Son of God; or as he stiles himself, *the Son of Man*, with a reference to the nature, which he took upon him when he came among mankind. *The Field is the world*: herein he planted a Church composed of true Disciples, whom he calls *the Children of the Kingdom*, as well because they acknowledge him for their King both in their faith and practice, as also because on that acknowledgement they look for a portion with him in the inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom.

Yet

SERM. Yet though the Field was the Lord's, it was open to the intrusions of an Enemy. The Foe of God and Man contrived to sow his Tares among the Good Seed. Hence as the growth of the Church advanced, it was discovered, that corruptions were blended with the pure and genuine doctrines of the gospel, that false Christians were risen among the true, that Wicked men were intermingled with the Righteous.

The consequence of this intrusion is a frequent subject of lamentation to many pious Christians; some of whom in their zeal for their Master's honour might suppose it consonant to justice, that the Lord of the spiritual field should interfere in his mediatorial government and root out all evil doers from the earth. But such a special interference, however suitable to his justice it may be thought, is not in harmony with his wisdom and benevolence. In the common course of things the eradication of the wicked must endanger the being and well being of the righteous. Out of care for the stability and welfare of his Church on earth, he determines for a time to bear the evil on account of the good, to endure

endure the wicked for the sake of the righteous. SERM. V.

But though he may for a season be content to see mankind walking according to their own ways; some wandering into error, and some adhering to the truth; those totally neglecting his service, and these having respect unto his commandments; yet a time will arrive, when his attribute of justice will transcendantly appear. When the harvest of the world is ripe, the Son of Man shall send forth his Angels to be the Reapers of the spiritual Field: and according to his word they *shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and all who do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Very different from theirs will be the destinies of the Righteous: as Children of light they shall be gathered into the realms of light; and being invested with the glories of the Sun of Righteousness, they *shall shine as the Sun in the kingdom of their Father.*

In concurrence with this parable of the Tares among the Wheat I have to notice another, which our Lord delivered afterwards, when he was apart

SERM. V. with his Disciples. This also like the former was suggested probably from the circumstance of the scene he had newly left and of the company that still attended him. He had been preaching from a ship or fishing vessel on the coast of the sea of Galilee, and his present Hearers were his Disciples; some of whom he had called on that very coast, when they were following the business of Fishermen.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a Net, that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sate down and gathered the Good into vessels, but cast the Bad away[b]. Now this is an image of our Saviour spreading forth his gospel for the reception of mankind, as also of his Disciples after him, whom from the humble employment of Fishermen he had called to the important office of being Fishers of men. In consequence of whose preaching the gospel is professed by Men of every kind both Bad and Good. But at the end of the world a final separation will be made. For *the Angels shall come forth and shall*

[b] Matt. xiii. 47, 48.

sever

sever the Wicked from among the Just, SERM. *and shall cast them into the furnace of* V. *fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth* [c].

I need say no more of this similitude, since the doctrine it contains is stated more at large in the parable, on which I now discourse, of the Tares among the Wheat.—When our Lord had given his interpretation of this parable, he made this solemn call upon the attention of his audience, *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear:* who hath faculties of understanding, let him understand. According to this admonition I would first examine the doctrine which the parable contains, and afterwards inquire into the practical improvement.

BEFORE I enter upon the doctrine, which the parable was intended more expressly to inculcate, it may be useful to consider it in a more general point of view, as it serves to illustrate the economy of divine Providence in permitting the existence of evil, not only in the Christian Church, but in the total order of the Universe.

[c] Matt. xiii. 49, 50.

When

SERM. V. When we inquire into the nature and attributes of that Power, who created and who controls the world, we cannot but regard him as a Being of consummate wisdom, justice, and benevolence. But when we look into his works, our reason is discomposed on beholding what is obvious to daily observation, that good is intermingled with evil. This problem frequently engaged the inquiries of the Heathen Philosophers; and in their endeavours to solve it we may suppose them to say to the Creator and Governor of the world like the Servants in the parable, *Didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it tares?*

After all their inquiries the problem still remained unsolved, being far too difficult for the powers of reason to investigate. It was left for God himself to explain this question by a revelation from above. We learn from his holy word, that the fabric of the world originally came out of the hands of its divine Artificer complete and pure; and at the close of the creation it is recorded, that *God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good*[d]. This

[d] Gen. i. 31.

is

is more especially to be noted in the last of his works: *He created man in his own image*[e], that is on the model of his own moral goodness. Such was his exalted nature, when he was first placed in paradise. But soon, too soon an Enemy intruded into the garden of the Lord, and sowed his tares among the wheat. And when by his subtle insinuations he had prevailed upon our first Parents to transgress that one command which their Creator had imposed, corruption and disorder entered into the world[f].—And as he contrived at first to sow his tares in paradise, so he has continued ever since very diligent in sowing his tares in the human heart; in consequence of which there is a law in our body warring against the law of our mind, and striving to bring it into captivity to the dominion of sin[g].

SERM. V.

All this is accurately seen by the Creator and Governor of the world. For his eye is in every place beholding the evil and the good. But though for a time he suffers evil to prevail, he does not suffer it to shoot in such luxuriance as to choke the better seed. Though

[e] Gen. i. 27. [f] Gen. iii. [g] Rom. vii. 23.

man

SERM. V. man is fallen from his primitive innocence, though our nature is corrupted and depraved, and we sensibly perceive in our hearts a strong propensity to evil, yet the God of mercies does not give us over into the hands of an Enemy. He employs every means consistent with the liberty of human choice, to restore us to holiness upon earth, and to bring us to happiness in heaven. He has given us reason for a guide to enable us to discriminate between right and wrong: he has given us conscience for a monitor to direct us in chusing between good and evil. In support of the suggestions of reason and conscience he hath superadded a written word, which affords a certain rule of conduct, and administers a most prevailing motive to a wise and proper choice: he continues to give us the grace of his Holy Spirit to defend us, if we be not wanting to ourselves, from the assaults and devices of the Tempter, and to make us grow in grace in spite of every impediment and incumbrance.

But another question may arise in this argument: since God has an absolute authority over all his works, why should he be satisfied with counteract-

ing

ing evil, when he might suppress it al- SERM. together? Why should he permit in his V. creation a perpetual conflict with an Enemy, when at a word he might reduce him to nothing? For this our reason is again at a loss to account: and for a satisfactory solution of this difficulty we must again have recourse to the word of revelation, which instructs us that this temporary alloy of evil is essential to the trial and even the subsistence of the good. And this corresponds with the answer given to the Servants in the parable, when they asked their Lord whether they should go and root out the tares from among the wheat: but he said, *Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*

To constitute a state of trial, which the present life is designed to be, it is necessary that there should be some conflict in the choice we make. For unless there was evil to refuse, what virtue could there be in chusing good? Unless we had passions to control and temptations to resist, what exercise could we have to prove and establish our spiritual character?

To

SERM. V.

To constitute a state of trial it seems equally expedient, that the retribution of our works should be remitted to a distant period, even to that future life, when the evil shall be finally separated from the good. *Let both grow together until the harvest*, is the wise and temperate language of the spiritual Sower. If an instant recompence of reward or punishment were the immediate and invariable consequence of doing good or evil, what room could there be for trial, where there could not exist any liberty of choice? But when the rewards of virtue and the punishments of vice are removed into another world, our spiritual character is capable of trial, because we are left at liberty to chuse between the good and the evil. To determine us however to a wise and proper choice, life and death are set before us in the infallible word of God: if we chuse the good, we shall reap everlasting life; and if we chuse the evil, we shall incur everlasting death.

After this more general view of the parable, I come now to consider that particular doctrine which it was intended more expressly to inculcate;

cate; namely, That for the present life the Wicked are endured for the sake of the Righteous. That the good seed may take no damage by a premature attempt to eradicate the tares, they are suffered to grow together until the end of the world, when a final separation will be made. SERM. V.

If we look into the history of the Patriarchs and the chosen People, when God more ostensibly interfered in the government of the Universe, we may find that the judgements of the Lord have been frequently abroad in the earth, and that at different times he has taken exemplary vengeance on guilty nations and a guilty world. Yet in all this display of avenging justice he has been always pleased to take the righteous under his more especial providence and protection. Thus when he brought a flood upon a world of ungodly men, he saved Noah a Preacher and a Practiser of Righteousness with all his righteous house. And when he turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, he delivered righteous Lot and his family from the general overthrow. Even in this awful exercise of justice we see a memorable instance of the influence,

SERM. V. fluence, which the righteous have in heaven, to avert the uplifted stroke of an avenging God; as we learn from the conference which he held with Abraham just before this terrible example was given; at the close of which the Almighty thus affirms, *If I find in the City ten righteous men, I will not destroy it for ten's sake*[h].

And the same protecting care, which he showed for the righteous in their own persons and families, was extended over others, in whom they had a remoter degree of interest. On the prayer of righteous Lot God was pleased to spare the small city of Zoar, which had been devoted to the same destruction with the guilty cities around it. At the intercession of Aaron the plague was staid from among the children of Israel. For the sake of David the punishment of Judah was remitted to a distant age.

In all these cases indeed we behold a preternatural visitation of divine Providence. For a stated season God was pleased to deviate from his standing laws in his government of mankind. But having thus more expressly as-

[h] Gen. xviii. 32.

serted

serted to the Patriarchs and the People of Israel that principle of justice by which he rules the world, he does not judge it expedient to continue this miraculous interference to later times. And though in the ordinary course of his providence he still carries on a secret process of retributive justice towards both the righteous and the wicked, yet in general we observe, that his sun impartially shines on the evil and on the good, his rain indifferently falls on the just and on the unjust [i].

SERM. V.

In the present state of things they are so intimately blended in society, that we cannot imagine how the wicked could be eradicated without injury to the righteous. As they are connected in the world by many ties of country and vicinity, relation and affection, what destroys the one class of men must of necessity affect the other also. If any of the judgements of God be sent abroad into the world, whether tempest or earthquake or famine or plague or fire or the sword, the righteous and the wicked are equally exposed to the same common suffering. And since the mer-

[i] Matt. v. 45.

SERM. V. cies of God are more abundant than his severities, he spares the wicked for the present rather than involve the righteous in the punishment of their guilt.

In another respect this economy of Providence is useful to the righteous, as it puts them to a greater trial here, and thereby places them in a capacity to attain a greater recompence hereafter.

It puts them to a greater trial here in these two respects; by exposing them to a severer conflict with evil, and by giving them larger opportunities of doing good.

There cannot be a more arduous exercise of virtue than to be exposed to a conflict with prevailing wickedness. To be upright among the upright is no extraordinary praise. But to retain one's integrity in a country, which is involved in vice, to be true to God in an age, which is fallen into gross apostacy both of principle and practice, is an unquestionable proof of a truly religious man. A man of indifference in spiritual concerns will shrink from the test; he will not escape the contagion of vice; he will be ready to follow a multitude to do

do evil. But a man conscientiously righteous will not scruple to submit to any inconvenience and to make any sacrifice, to keep himself unspotted from the world. Of this patient and heroic fortitude the sacred history supplies many memorable examples both among the Patriarchs and the Prophets. Thus Noah, Lot, and Daniel were assailed in their virtue by the prevailing characters of all around, being exposed to scorn and shame and even persecution for the sake of righteousness; yet they kept themselves pure and uncorrupted in a corrupt and abandoned age. As the gold which is seven times purified in the fire they passed through the fiery trial with an increase of lustre; they approved themselves more in the sight of God, and no doubt they would obtain a more eminent reward. SERM. V.

Again it puts them to a greater trial, by giving them larger opportunities of doing good. It not only brings their virtues to the test, but it also makes their virtues beneficial to the world. By their good conversation and exemplary practice they inculcate even on the wicked some sentiments of virtue and some dispositions to religion. In

SERM. V. this respect the Patriarchs already mentioned did not spare their exertions in behalf of a better conduct. Thus Noah was a Preacher of righteousness to a world of ungodly men: thus Lot remonstrated with his Fellow-citizens on their atrocious wickedness: thus Daniel shewed his disapprobation of undue compliances in the courts of Kings by an open worship of the true God, even when it involved him in danger and persecution. And if they were not so successful in reforming others as in keeping themselves incorrupt, the fault was in the world around, who were become too hardened in wickedness to be recovered by a solitary instance of true and undissembled virtue.

Yet the scriptures afford us some illustrious examples of the power of a virtuous energy in reforming a corrupt and irreligious world. When the Prophet Jonah preached to Nineveh, and announced that the judgements of God were then impending over them, and would in a little time overwhelm them, so powerful was his word, that there was an instant and universal humiliation and repentance from the greatest to the least, so as even to avert the punishment

ment which was ready to fall upon them. For *when God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened, and he did it not*[k]. SERM. V.

And as this disposition of Providence is thus designed in favour to the righteous, it is also contrived to operate in mercy to the wicked. By this forbearance of judgement they have time allowed them for repentance; and by their intercourse with the righteous they are supplied with incitements to repentance. Of all the means, which a gracious Providence employs for the reformation of the wicked, there is none more powerful than the society of the righteous. If there were none on every side but companions in wickedness, they might encourage one another in evil courses from the universal practice of the world. But placed as they are in the present order of society, they behold in the righteous the most pointed reprehension of an irreligious life and the most persuasive inducement to a better conduct. Thus from the present intermixture of characters an oppor-

[k] Jonah iii. 10.

SERM. V. tunity is extended, to the righteous of conferring, and to the wicked of deriving, the greatest possible good, namely the salvation of souls to all eternity.

HAVING stated the doctrine which the parable conveys, I have now to deduce the practical improvement. Now this may be considered in a double respect, as the instruction it conveys is either Absolute or Relative.

As the instruction it conveys is Absolute, we may draw from the parable this salutary caution, that we be upon our guard against the seductions and assaults of the Tempter. In the present state of trial, good and evil, life and death are set before us, and we are free to chuse. But notwithstanding that our choice is free, we are warned of a subtle and powerful Adversary, who is always ready to annoy us by every species of temptation. To counteract his wiles we are taught for our comfort, that we have a most powerful and benevolent Friend in the Holy Spirit, who is always ready to impart his grace to those that devoutly ask and diligently seek it.

It

It imports us at all times, but especially when we are beginning our religious course, to be strictly vigilant against the insidious intrusions of our spiritual Foe, to keep the ground of our hearts unincumbered with the tares of evil, to maintain an unremitting guard against the various temptations of the world, and to have a continual watch over our own passions and propensities: for a man's worst foes are often those of his own household[1]. And as we have no power of ourselves to withstand this evil Spirit, or to make any progress in righteousness, it equally imports us that we supplicate with all humility the guardian care of the divine Spirit, to protect us in all dangers, to support us in all trials, to put into our hearts good dispositions and desires; and that we concur with this holy Visitant ourselves by an assiduous endeavour to cultivate and improve every grace and every aid conferred upon us. SERM. V.

To engage us in these exercises of religion it would be an useful employ-

[1] Matt. x. 36.

SERM. V. ment frequently to compare the different consequences of yielding to the temptations of our spiritual Foe, and of complying with the motions of our spiritual Friend.

If in this our day of trial we neglect the means of grace and abuse the patience and long-suffering of God by continuing in our sins, he will cease to protect and support us with his holy Spirit, and will judicially leave us to the seductions and assaults of the Tempter. In consequence of which the power of this evil Spirit will prevail in our hearts, the seeds of good dispositions will be choked within us, and our vicious passions will obtain the mastery. Thus we shall be as plants, whose fruit withereth, and which at the time of harvest are gathered as bundles for the flames.

On the other hand, if we strive against our spiritual Adversary with all the powers which God has given us, if we avail ourselves of this appointed hour for the work of our salvation, and accept those means of grace which God affords us for our nutriment in righteousness, if we labour to establish ourselves

on

on the firm root of faith and to increase more and more in the fruit of good living; the dews of heavenly grace will give us nurture and promote our increase; the tares of unlawful affections will be suppressed in our hearts, and the good seeds of virtuous dispositions will predominate and abound. So shall we grow up as the choice plants of the Lord: and when the harvest of the world is ripe, and the final separation is appointed to be made, we shall be gathered by the Reapers of the spiritual Field, and stored for ever in the granary of heaven. SERM. V.

This parable urges an important truth, a truth which is indeed implied in all our Saviour spoke, that according as we establish our character in this life, we shall determine our destiny in the life to come. If we submit to the law, and conform to the disposition, of our spiritual King, we are the Children of the Kingdom, and shall have an inheritance in eternal happiness. But if we neglect this law, and yield ourselves to the dominion of Satan, we are the Children of the Wicked, and shall have our portion in eternal misery.

When

SERM. V.

When such vast consequences depend upon the choice we make in life, it is certainly our first concern to examine the condition of our souls, that we may recover ourselves, if we are in a state of wrath, or that we may advance ourselves, if we are in a state of grace.

If upon a steady search into our own hearts and a strict review of our own lives we have reason to fear that we are the Children of the Wicked, it is incumbent on us, as we would escape the wrath to come, to resort to the throne of grace for pardon through the merits of our blessed Lord, to repent of our sins without delay, to devote ourselves to God and goodness, and to redeem the time so long misspent in sin by a double diligence in the service of the Lord.

If on the other hand we have room to hope that we are the Children of the Kingdom, it is equally incumbent on us, as we would ensure and increase our reward in heaven, that we implore of God a continuance of his grace to support us in the better way, that sustained by his gracious aid we persevere therein with

with all diligence and patience, and that we labour to conform ourselves to the likeness of God in every branch of imitable virtue. SERM. V.

As the instruction which the parable conveys is Relative, we may hence derive a lesson, that concerns us all as connected in society with our fellow-creatures and fellow-christians; which is, that we be cautious of judging and condemning others. An ardent and intolerant spirit not according to true knowledge has too much prevailed in the Church of the meek and lowly Jesus. And men in their intemperate warmth for what they arrogantly judged to be the true and only way, have too frequently forgotten that spirit of meekness and charity, so conspicuous in him whom they acknowledge for their Lord. How many examples does the history of the Christian Church record of men in authority presumptuously taking the prerogative of judging out of the hand of the Almighty, and by the sword of the civil power attempting to eradicate opinions which they called heresies out of the field of the Lord! On the other hand how different is the lesson which our holy Teacher

SERM. V. Teacher gives in his own instructive life! On his preparing to enter into a village of the Samaritans they would not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem; by which he was supposed to chuse the temple of Sion for the place of public worship in preference to their temple on Mount Gerizim. His Disciples James and John were so much offended at this inhospitable treatment, that they said to their Master, *Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned and rebuked them, saying, Ye know not what spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them*[m].

In the present age of the world, more distinguished for indifference than for zeal in religious concerns, there is no great need of teaching toleration in practice. But yet it may not be needless to preach toleration in sentiment. If therefore we fall into the way of men, who differ from us whether in religious discipline or doctrine, let not this provoke us to transgress the law of Chris-

[m] Luke ix. 51, &c.

tian

tian charity, which ought to bind us all in brotherly affection. If we cannot be altogether of one mind, we may notwithstanding be of one heart. As long as men are united with us in the fundadamental principles of faith in Jesus Christ, we should remember, as the Apostle teaches, that *through him we both have access through one Spirit unto the Father:* and therefore we should account them *not as strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the Saints and of the household of God*[n]. For this reason also, as the Apostle exhorts in the sequel of the same epistle, we should *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*[o].

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If men indeed are erroneous, not in their opinions, but in their practice, if they have fallen into that worst of heresies, the heresy of a wicked life, there indeed we have more reason to be dissatisfied with their conduct. But who made us judges of our brethren? To

[n] Eph. ii. 18, 19. [o] Eph. iv. 1, &c.

SERM. V. their own Master only do they stand or fall. And if a righteous God endures them why should we, who are also guilty in his sight, presume to be intolerant? Though their conduct be accounted evil, yet they may be less reprehensible than appearance or report may make them: or if they are really as wicked as they seem, they are still within the reach of grace, they are still within the compass of repentance.

To the charity of sentiment we are also to add the charity of conduct. The same principle of our religion, which enjoins us not to judge our brethren, or to look for errors in them while we overlook the sins in ourselves [p], enjoins us at the same time to look, not only at our own, but also at another's wealth [q]; that is, to consult the temporal, and still more the spiritual wealth or welfare of our brethren, and by the united means of good conversation and good example to reclaim them from a state of sin, and to promote their progress in the way of righteousness.

[p] Matt. vii. 3. [q] 1 Cor. x. 24.

To

To effect these salutary measures there are different claims upon all orders and relations of mankind: on the Parent or Guardian, that he train up his Children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and that he keep them from the haunts and habits of vice with patient and unremitting care: on the Magistrate or Governor, that he discountenance and discourage vice with all the weight of his authority, and that he labour to maintain all the decencies of piety and morality: above all on the Minister or Teacher of the gospel, that he keep religion alive in the heart, and that he reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine; that both he and the people committed to his care may be prepared for the appearing and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ[r]. Even every private man, as connected with his neighbours in the bonds of Christian love, has a certain obligation upon him, to offer up his prayers for the conversion and forgiveness of the wicked, and to endeavour the same salutary purpose by the tenour of his life and conversation.

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[r] 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2.

Such

SERM. V. Such conciliating measures are much more agreeable to the economy of divine Providence in the operations of nature, as also more in unison with the spirit of the gospel, than measures of violence and persecution. Thus if we cannot eradicate, we may in some degree suppress the tares of evil, which are so common in the field of the Lord: and if we cannot exclude the wicked from the society of the righteous, we may possibly be enabled by the assisting grace of God to effect a greater and a better work, in reclaiming the wicked into the number of the righteous. By such a conduct we shall best concur with the wise and benevolent designs of the spiritual Sower in suffering the tares to be mingled with the wheat. And thus in obedience to the great Christian law we may contribute to avert the wrath of God from others, at the same time that we advance ourselves in his favour and acceptance. For surely no service can be more acceptable to God, than what is at the same time so beneficial to men. Nor can we more effectually conform ourselves to the example of our Lord, than by our labours in promoting the salvation

tion of those, for whom he offered up his life a sacrifice for sin. To this work of love we are encouraged by a powerful motive: the fuller service we render unto God upon earth, the higher recompence we shall receive in heaven; and the nearer resemblance we bear to the example of Christ in this intermingled state of good and bad, the nearer shall we approach him among the Saints in light.

SERM. V.

SERMON VI.

THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED.

MATT. XIII. 31, 32.

Another Parable put he forth unto them, saying; The Kingdom of Heaven is like to a Grain of Mustard Seed, which a Man took and sowed in his Field; which indeed is the least of all Seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

THIS Parable is one of that series, which our Lord delivered from a ship on the coast of the sea of Galilee. In the multitude of Hearers, who were then ranged before him on the shore, he might probably contemplate the beginning of that Church which he was come to establish. This might lead him to give some prophetic intimation

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SERM. VI. of its rise and progress in the world. Through all this discourse, which he delivers in the language of parable, he stiles his Church the Kingdom of Heaven. He calls it a Kingdom, because it imposes a law and exercises an authority over mankind: he calls it the Kingdom of Heaven, because it is governed by a King, who came from heaven, and is returned to heaven, and though established upon earth for a season, yet will it be transferred to heaven for all eternity.

The gentle, yet rapid and extensive growth of this divine Kingdom is represented here by two Similitudes, adapted to the common employments of either sex, the one from rural, the other from domestic life. *The Kingdom of Heaven is like to a Grain of Mustard Seed, which a Man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto Leaven, which a Woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

Now

Now these two parables in their design and interpretation are one. Alike relating to the Kingdom or the Church of Christ on earth, they equally represent its gentle nature and diffusive increase. To avoid a confusion of images I shall confine my attention to the former of these similitudes; on which I chuse to treat in preference, because it is frequently employed by the Prophets, when they describe the character and progress of our Saviour's Kingdom. And surely none can be more expressive, than that of a stem insensibly rising from the least of seeds to the height and compass of a tree. Thus Isaiah, more peculiarly the Prophet of the Gospel, after describing the fall of temporal Kingdoms under the image of a Forest hewn down with iron, and of Lebanon falling by a mighty hand, proceeds with a reference to our Saviour's spiritual Kingdom to say; *And there shall come forth a Rod out of the Stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his Roots*[a]. Such also is the language of the Prophet Jeremiah; *Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will* SERM. VI.

[a] Isa. xi. 1.

SERM. VI. *raise unto David a righteous Branch; and a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgement and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely. And this is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness*[b]. And to sum up all with a beautiful description of the Psalmist, which refers in its primary sense to the Jewish constitution, but applies with fuller emphasis to the Kingdom of Christ: *Thou hast brought a Vine out of Egypt: Thou hast cast out the Heathen and planted it. Thou madest room for it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedar trees. She sent out her boughs unto the Sea, and her branches to the River*[c].

Now all these prophetic images were clearly and completely fulfilled in the mild and diffusive growth of the Christian doctrine. In order to display their exact accomplishment, it may be proper to give some brief account of the rise and progress of that dominion, which had been the constant argument

[b] Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. [c] Psalm lxxx. 8, &c.

of

of ancient prophecy, and which it was the object of our Saviour's coming to establish in the world. SERM. VI.

We cannot conceive a more humble beginning of any kingdom, than of that which our Saviour came to found. A poor unlettered Peasant, neither distinguished by birth or education, came forth from an obscure city of Galilee, announcing to mankind that *the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.* To outward appearance he had nothing to recommend him to the regard of men. He had no pleasures for the voluptuous, for he required of men self-denial and suffering for his sake: he had no riches for the covetous, for he required of his followers not to set their affections on worldly possessions: he had no honours for the ambitious, for the lesson which he first inculcated was humility and poverty of spirit. Thus according to the language of the Prophet *he grew up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he had no form nor comeliness; and when men saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him*[d].

[d] Isa. liii. 2.

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Yet humble as he was to all outward appearance, he had an embassy from Heaven of the greatest importance to mankind; for he had a law to impart for their constant observance in this life, and he had an assurance to yield them of a recompence in another life according to the tenour of their obedience. And as an evidence that God was with him, he was invested with miraculous powers, which he was continually exercising to beneficial purposes. He went about doing good, as well to the bodies as to the souls of men, *teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people*[e].

Yet notwithstanding all these tokens that he came from God, and that he bore good will to men, as the Prophet continues his description, *he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not*[f]. After he had walked some time upon earth, he was betrayed into the hands of those who

[e] Matt. iv. 23. [f] Isa. liii. 3, 6.

sought

sought his life, and was sentenced to the painful and ignominious death of the cross: *He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.* SERM. VI.

But on the third day he rose again from the dead, and appeared to his Disciples, whom he had chosen to be the Companions of his travels, the Witnesses of his miracles, and the future Apostles of his doctrines. And having staid upon earth forty days to satisfy them that he was risen indeed, he gave them a command to go and preach the gospel to all nations; and then in the presence of a multitude of amazed spectators he ascended into heaven.

On the tenth day after his ascension they were visited by a miraculous effusion of the holy Spirit, and found themselves endowed, as their Lord had promised, with supernatural powers from on high. In consequence of which they went forth every where, preaching the doctrine of their lately crucified, but now exalted Lord. And by their patient and unwearied labours the sound of the gospel was conveyed into all lands,

SERM. VI. lands, its words were diffused unto the ends of the world [s].

In the beginning of their ministry their preaching was limited to the house of Israel; and notwithstanding the prejudice entertained among the Jews against the doctrine of a crucified Redeemer, yet there were daily added to the Church great multitudes of souls. But in a little time it was signified to them by the Spirit, that this was too confined a field for so great and beneficial a work. In consequence of which they dispersed into different regions of the Gentile world. Wherever they went, they were diligent in planting and in watering this divine seed, while God himself gave an abundant increase. Hence in spite of the philosophy of the learned and the superstition of the common people this Branch from the Root of Jesse made its way in the earth: and though persecution in every form was attached to the profession of it, it throve and prospered in the face of heaven. The Roman Historians record one severe persecution under the Emperor Nero, in which the Christians were exposed to

[s] Psalm xix. 4.

such

such miserable torments, as we might have hoped for the credit of human nature that man could not inflict on man. And in this persecution the Apostles Peter and Paul are believed to have suffered martyrdom. But the seed of the divine word had by this time gained too deep a root in the world to be eradicated by violence. The opposition that it met with seems rather to have promoted than retarded its growth. Under the Emperor Trajan the Christian Religion engaged the particular notice of the civil Magistrate. The younger Pliny, then a Governor of one of the Provinces of Lesser Asia, complains in his epistle to the Emperor, that on account of this new Faction the temples were deserted; and though disposed to treat them with severity for their contempt of the national worship, yet he bore testimony at the same time to their moral character, that they assembled on certain days to pray to Christ as to God, when they bound themselves by a sacrament or oath, that they would commit no murder, no theft, no adultery, and that they would be true and upright in their dealings in society.

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Thus

SERM. VI. Thus without molesting or disturbing either the private or the public peace, it continued to establish its root in the world, till it had attained a more powerful dominion than had ever been exercised by the greatest Potentates of the earth. After it had struggled against the powers of the world for three hundred years it reached the throne of Kings; and under Constantine it was adopted on the ruins of the ancient superstitions and idolatries for the established religion of the Roman Empire. The short opposition it encountered under Julian served only to try it, and to give it a firmer establishment. And when the Roman Empire was invaded, and in the end overpowered by those various hordes of Barbarians, which the fertile North poured forth in abundance, the Christian Empire still remained triumphant: the Faith of Christ interrupted them in the midst of their victorious career, and bowed the Conquerors of Rome to the banners of the Cross.

It was not long indeed before it suffered a considerable defalcation by the rise and progress of the Mahometan Faith, which at an early period overrun Arabia and the Holy Land, and in a little

little space of time extended along the whole Northern coast of Africa, and penetrated into Spain: yet even in these countries a great many continued true to the Christian cause. But what it lost in the South and East, it gained in the North and West. Not confining its dominion to the various Colonies of Goths and Vandals, who had established themselves on the ruins of the Roman Empire, it penetrated into the original seats of these ferocious Conquerors; and the worship of Odin, the God of War, every where yielded to the milder dominion of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. In this our Isle, where the sound of the Gospel had been heard at an early period among the ancient Britons, it was again respected on the conversion of the Saxons: and afterwards it was rapidly diffused over all the Northern Continent of Europe. In later times, if it lost by the encroachment of the Turks and the overthrow of the Eastern Empire, it gained in the West by the reduction of the Moors in Spain. The progress of navigation and discovery, though chiefly undertaken out of a principle of ambition or of avarice, was by the secret direction of divine

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Pro-

SERM. VI. Providence rendered instrumental to extend the Christian name over the remotest regions of the earth. By the establishment of Colonies it has gained extensive ground over the Continent of America: and by the same cause it has been advanced in India, and is now dividing that Country with the Votaries of Brahma and the Followers of Mahomet. By the active and pious labours of Missionaries it has been spread in countries under the extremes of heat and cold. It has been preached on the frozen coast of Greenland: it has been resounded on the sultry shores of Senegal.

In this brief review of the history of the Christian Church we see the gradual accomplishment of our Lord's prophetic parable of a Grain of Mustard-seed ascending and increasing to the height and compass of a tree, as also of those prophecies of an earlier age respecting the Rod that was to come out of the Stem of Jesse, and the Branch that was to grow out of his Root. Thus God was glorified in the Branch of his planting, in the work of his hands: thus a little one is become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; the Lord himself

himself hath hastened it in his own due time [h]. And though some of its boughs were blighted by various heresies and corruptions, and some were more violently cropt by the pestilence of the Mahometan superstition, yet it still continued to shoot out branches far and wide, and to bear fruit abundantly, till it was diffused from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the Earth. SERM. VI.

The success which has hitherto attended its diffusion is an earnest to us, that in the fulness of time these prophetic intimations will be accomplished in their full extent; that all Heathens shall be converted, all Mahometans reclaimed, all Jews renounce their prejudices, and look on him whom they pierced [i]. The Cross of Christ shall universally triumph, and *the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea* [k].

While we contemplate this growth of our Religion, we shall do well to join in the supplication of the Psalmist; *Look down, O God, from heaven; behold*

[h] Isa. lx. 21, 22. [i] Zech. xii. 10. [k] Isa. xi. 9.

and

SERM. VI. *and visit this vine; and the branch that thou madest so strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name*[l].

THIS parable, in common with most of those which our Saviour spoke, will admit of a double application; in particular to the Disciples who heard it; and in general to all other Christians to whom it is transmitted in the gospel.

IF we consider its application to the first Disciples, it would hold forth an encouragement to them for that arduous undertaking, which was shortly to devolve upon them, of preaching his gospel through the world. Poor and humble as they were in station and circumstance of life, uncultivated in their understandings, and unacquainted with the ways of men, yet were they the chosen instruments of that Providence, which hath appointed the weak things of the world to control the mighty, and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise[m], in

[l] Psal. lxxx, 14, &c. [m] 1 Cor. i. 27.

planting

planting that religion, which in the fulness of time should overspread the earth. Whatever dangers they might encounter, and whatever toils they might sustain, they had this assurance from an infallible word, that by means of their diligence and labours the Branch of the Lord should be beautiful and glorious, and its fruit on the earth should be excellent and comely[n]. Such a prospect was abundantly sufficient to support and animate them in every trial, and to give them fortitude and comfort even in the midst of persecutions. For what could the malice or the power of man avail to dismay those men, who confidently knew, that to them was committed by the King of Kings the task of conveying the tidings of salvation through the world, and of bringing all nations to the knowledge of the truth? Even in the pangs of an excruciating death, to which they were continually liable for the sake of righteousness, it would be to them matter of joy unspeakable and full of glory, that they were now passing into the regions of happiness to be peopled by their successful

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[n] Isa. iv. 2.

SERM. VI. cessful ministry; where being restored to the society of their blessed Master they would with him see the fruit of the travel of their souls, and be satisfied [o].

If we proceed to consider its application to all other Christians, we shall find it to supply different heads of instruction, as it severally yields an argument of faith, and an exhortation to a faithful practice.

And first, as it yields an argument of Faith. As the parable gave encouragement to the Disciples in preaching the gospel through the world, so also does it yield the world a convincing proof, that what they preached was of divine authority. The two great Evidences for the truth of any Revelation are Prophecy and Miracle; in both which respects the Religion of Christ has a preeminent advantage. In the several circumstances of his life and character our Saviour was foretold by most of the ancient Prophets in concurrence. And when he came according to their predictions, he wrought such mighty works as no man could do unless God were

[o] Isa. liii. 11.

with

with him. Herein the witness which he bore of his divine mission, while it extended to all men, had a special and more forcible application to his Cotemporaries and Countrymen the Jews, who had an immediate interest in the prophecies that related to him, and who were eye-witnesses of the miracles that he performed. SERM. VI.

And that later times and other people might be put in possession of a testimony not inferior to that of the Jews, he prophecied himself the rise and progress of that spiritual Kingdom which he founded upon earth. And according to what he had foretold he supplied his Disciples with extraordinary powers to accomplish this important design. Yet the means which they employed were in no wise adequate according to the conceptions of human reason to so vast and marvellous a work. *Though they walked in the flesh, they did not war after the flesh: for the weapons of their warfare were not carnal; but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations and every thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of*

SERM. VI. *Christ* [p]. Instead of active courage and enterprize, which the Warriors of this world are accustomed to display, they were called to the exercise 'of patience and heroic martyrdom:' and by submitting to persecutions they undertook to subdue the world. All other dominions have been established by an arm of flesh: but this dominion bore internal evidence, that it was established by the power of divine grace and by the sword of the Spirit.

That a Plant, arising from so small a seed, should in spite of all incumbrance grow to the height and compass of so large a tree, is an undeniable proof, that the special eye of divine Providence continually watched its growth, and that the dews of heavenly grace have been abundantly dispensed to give it nurture and promote the increase. That a Kingdom, risen from such weak beginnings, and advancing by such improbable means to so large and extensive a dominion, should successfully prevail in spite of every impediment from the passions and prejudices of men, and should finally triumph over

[p] 2 Cor. x. 3, &c.

all

all the Kingdoms of the world, is an unquestionable argument, that its origin was from Heaven, and that its Builder and Maker was God[q]. SERM. VI.

Again, while the parable supplies an argument of Christian Faith, it also yields an encouragement to Christian Practice. It directs us where we may resort for protection and comfort under the unavoidable troubles of human life. And so much we may understand to be implied in what is said, that *the birds of the air came and lodged in the branches thereof.* For though it is not necessary to look for an express and particular import in every minuter circumstance of parable, yet this interpretation it will fairly and reasonably bear. Without the countenance of religion mankind would be left in a desolate and deplorable condition, would be exposed to every blast of evil without any shelter of resort. Such was the case of the Heathens, who, though they had some notion of a superior Being, yet had no fixed idea of those attributes of wisdom and goodness, with which he reveals himself in the gospel; and there-

[q] Heb. xi. 10.

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fore had no firm trust in his providence, and no assured expectation of a world to come. Equally unacquainted with the nature of God and the design of Man, they were at a loss for some anchor of the soul, on which to rest their hopes in the uncertain and frequently troubled ocean of human life. And when the waves and the storms came over them, they might be disposed with disconsolate inquietude to ask, *Who will shew us any good?* But why should our hearts be full of heaviness? Or why should our souls be disquieted within us? While we live under the shade of this healing plant, we can put our hope in God; we can go into his house with the voice of joy and gratitude, and offer up our prayers to him, who is the health of our countenance and our God[r]. Instructed as we are both in the attributes of God and the end of Man, we can commit the keeping of both our bodies and our souls to a faithful and merciful Creator[s], who is continually with us, and has daily holden us with his right hand, who guides us with his counsel now, and will afterwards receive us into

[r] Psalm xlii. 4, 5. [s] 1 Pet. iv. 19.

glory.

glory [t]. Provided we comply with the conditions he has appointed in his holy word, we have a certain ground of hope in every state and circumstance of life. If we are in possession of the good things of Providence, we are assured of better things in store at the resurrection of the just: and if we are burdened with the evil things of life, we are equally assured, that our light afflictions will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory [u]. Thus in all the situations and in all the vicissitudes of life we may always resort to this Branch of Righteousness, as a shadow from the heat and a covert from the storm [w].

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While therefore we are placed under the spreading tree of the Gospel, we ought to be very grateful for the blessing of this divine shade. And that we may duly express our gratitude to God for his inestimable gift, it is expedient that we carefully receive the seed of religion in our hearts, that we cherish it with all our care, and employ all our diligence to improve its nurture and

[t] Psalm lxxiii. 24.
[u] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [w] Isa. iv. 6.

SERM. VI. promote its increase. While the parable is understood to represent the rise and progress of religion among the nations of the earth, it may also be accepted to denote its rise and progress in the inner man. For as the Seed of Religion has had an external and visible growth in the field of the world, so it also still continues to have an internal and invisible growth in the human heart. Thus when the Pharisees demanded of our Lord when the Kingdom of God should come, his answer was, *The Kingdom of God cometh not by observation, neither shall they say, Lo here or lo there; for the Kingdom of God is within you*[x].

And indeed it is a great commendation of this divine kingdom, that it does not like other kingdoms operate merely on the outward and visible conduct of men; but it arrests the heart in the intention, it checks every propensity to vice, and it cherishes every disposition to virtue. The power of all temporal kingdoms is evinced no other way but by notice of overt acts, and is exerted more in the punishment of evil than in the recompence of good. It extends

[x] Luke xvii. 20, 21.

no

no farther than to discountenance by penal laws what is positively and directly detrimental to society. But the power of our Saviour's spiritual kingdom controls and guides the movements of the mind. It tries and examines our thoughts. And while by the terrors of the Lord it strongly discourages every vicious act and every corrupt affection, so by his imparted mercies and his promised blessings it forcibly encourages every branch and every degree of Christian virtue. On the one hand it forbids us to be angry with our brother without a cause; it forbids us to entertain any lustful thought; it forbids us to covet what belongs to another: on the other hand it enjoins us to love our neighbour as ourselves; to consider our bodies as the temples of the Holy Ghost; and to be content with the station in which Providence has placed us. Thus does it dispose us to be holy in a state of trial; and thus also does it qualify us to be happy in a state of recompence. SERM. VI.

To dispose the ground of our hearts for the reception of this heavenly seed, we should divest ourselves of all immoderate affection for the things of this world; we should wean our hearts from every

SERM. VI. every desire or design, which is at all inconsistent with the love of God, or might by any means obstruct us in a full compliance with his will; and we should pay a diligent attention to the divine word: for faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God[y].

To promote the growth of this divine seed, we should use those instrumental aids, which God has graciously supplied to his Church; we should frequent the assemblies of public worship and unite in every act of devotion, as conducive to the growth of good dispositions and virtuous affections; we should often resort with reverence to the holy communion to celebrate the memorial of him, who has planted his religion in the world. Nor should we limit our devotion to the place and hour of public worship, but should make it the subject of our private meditations and exercises; never omitting this petition in our daily prayers to God, that as he has been pleased to give the seed of true religion root in our hearts, so he will continue to nurture it with the dew of heavenly grace, that it may grow up

[y] Rom. x. 17.

in

in our habits, and shoot forth in our lives. SERM. VI.

And lastly, To prevent every obstacle to its growth in the inner man, we should invariably keep it impressed on our regard in our secular concerns and in our dealings with the world. It is not indeed to be expected of us in our present state of frailty, and while we abide in the world, to have God and religion always in our thoughts; for temporal things demand a portion of our care, and as our temporal, so our spiritual concerns require some degree of relaxation and amusement. But this is indispensably incumbent on us, that we live under a general sense of the divine will, that we engage in nothing repugnant to the law of God, that we endeavour in all our conversation and demeanour to promote these two great objects of religious precept, the glory of God and the benefit of men, and that we strive to maintain an unvarying habit of religion in our hearts, our dispositions, and our lives.

If we thus diligently cultivate the seeds of divine grace within us, we may depend upon the promise, which God has made by his Prophet; *Verily*

as

SERM. VI. *as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be, that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return to me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and make that prosper for the which I sent it* [z]. That which God pleases to accomplish is the holiness of men on earth, and the purpose for which he hath sent his word is the happiness of men in heaven. If we now grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ [a], we shall have our fruit unto holiness, and our end shall be everlasting life [b].

[z] Isaiah lv. 10, 11. [a] 2 Pet. iii. 18.

SERMON

SERMON VII.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

MATT. XIII. 45, 46.

Again, The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a Merchant seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one Pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

THE foregoing part of this chapter consists of a series of parables, which our Lord had been delivering to the people on the coast of the sea of Galilee. Having finished his discourse, he sent the multitude away and went into the house. At the desire of his Disciples, who continued to attend him, he explained unto them the more obscure or difficult of those parables, which he had recently spoken to the people;

SERM. VII. people; and he likewise added other parables, such as did not require so much of his assistance to interpret: *Again, The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto Treasure hid in a Field; the which when a Man hath found he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that Field. Again, The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a Merchant seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one Pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

These two parables are evidently the same in their design, being equally meant to shew the transcendent value of the gospel dispensation. For this is the Treasure hid in a field, this is the Pearl of great price, which he that finds it ought to purchase with the whole of his possessions.

The doctrine which they convey was designed in the first instance for the use of his Disciples to whom they were addressed. In the Gospel which he came to publish they had found a Treasure, which had hitherto been kept secret from the notice of the world; they had discovered a Pearl, which had never yet been estimated by the sons of men.

But

But they were not to imagine that so rich a Prize was of an easy purchase. Their Master plainly gave them to understand, that in order to secure this sovereign good they should be willing to forego every temporal and worldly good. But then on the other hand he firmly assured them, that the Prize for which they strove would yield them incomparably greater blessings than any which the world could afford. *When the Son of Man should sit on the throne of his glory, they also should sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve Tribes of Israel*[a].

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And this instruction of their blessed Lord they followed in their practice. Having this high prize of their calling ever in their mind, they spared no cost, they grudged no sacrifice to render it their own. For this they relinquished kindred, land, and home; for this they encountered every trial; for this they endured every labour; and finally for this they offered up their lives.

Thus the precept of Christ, as illustrated and exemplified in his Apostles, is a lesson to all who profess themselves

[a] Matt. xix. 28.

his

SERM. VII. his Disciples, that they duly estimate this divine treasure, so as to surrender every good in life that comes in competition with it.

THAT we may be better competent to appreciate the blessing, which our Saviour offers for the object of our diligent pursuit, let us first consider the value of those things which in the estimation of the world are most desirable.—The three great idols of human desire are Pleasure, Riches, and Honour.

The first pursuit of man is commonly that of Pleasure. Her voice is highly attractive to the young and inconsiderate, especially if the means are in their power for the gratification of their hearts. It is the language of her votaries, by which they encourage one another in every intemperate and unlawful indulgence, *Come on, let us enjoy the good things that are present; and let us speedily use the creatures in our youth: let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments: and let no flower of the spring pass by us: let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they be withered: let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness:*

let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place: for this is our portion, and our lot is this[b]. Alas! this dream of pleasure soon vanishes; and then what is the consequence of indulging every lawless and extravagant desire? The loss of fortune, the decline of health, a premature old age, the wreck of worldly comfort, a fearful apprehension of divine wrath, and an overwhelming dread to look beyond the grave. Surely this is vanity and vexation of spirit. SERM. VII.

Another pursuit, which engages men of all ranks and ages of life, is that of Riches. We have continual opportunity to observe, how the desire of worldly wealth encourages in every toil and animates to every enterprize the children of the world. For this they rise up early and late take rest and eat the bread of carefulness[c]: for this they till the ground, they navigate the main: for this they explore the bowels of the earth, they ransack the caverns of the deep. In this pursuit they leave no care or exercise untried. And if the prize they so assiduously seek could supply them with a durable and sub-

[b] Wisdom ii. 6, &c. [c] Psal. cxxvii. 2.

SERM. VII. stantial good, we might approve their wisdom in devoting all their faculties to gain it. But experience proves that the treasure, which they purchase at so great a cost, but seldom recompenses the labour and hazard they expend upon it. The possession as well as the acquisition is accompanied with many cares. It is precarious in its tenure, and deceitful in its promises. And if it does not fail or leave them in life, it must of necessity be left in death. Now this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

A third pursuit is that of Honour. This also has many votaries, especially among the more elevated ranks of life. They want to shine in more exalted stations, to be dignified with the favour of Princes, to be distinguished by the notice of the world. This pursuit also costs many cares, which are not recompensed by many comforts. Alas! they walk on thorns, while they climb the hill of fame; and they stand on a precipice, when they arrive at the summit. Their honours instead of yielding substantial happiness only serve to increase their fears of losing what they now possess, and to augment their jealousies of

of others who are striving in the same career. Thus they do not enjoy this apparent good, while in their possession: and when it survives in remembrance only, it remains a source of regret and disappointment. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit. SERM. VII.

Thus precarious and transient and deceitful are the several objects of the world's desire. Nor is this the worst that can be said of them. They are prejudicial to our dearest and most important interests, if they detach us at all from the concerns of eternity. And that such is their tendency cannot well be disputed. By an intemperate indulgence we hazard the attainment of those pure pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore. By an immoderate pursuit after riches we may be led to forfeit the true and unalienable treasures of a divine inheritance. By an extravagant ambition after worldly honours we may be tempted to forego that heavenly crown of glory which fadeth not away.

But that we may form a clearer estimation of what the world bestows, let us appeal to the testimony of one, who from personal experience was most com-

SERM. VII. petent to judge. Of all the men that ever lived perhaps there was none, who had a fuller knowledge of worldly goods than Solomon. Of pleasures he had all which the heart of man could desire: in riches he exceeded all the Kings of the earth: in empire he had dominion from the River to the Sea: and to enhance these endowments he had peace on all sides round about him, so that he enjoyed them without molestation or hindrance.

Yet let us hear the report that he made of these things after long possession and enjoyment: *I said in my heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure; and behold this also is vanity. I said of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what doeth it? I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting my heart with wisdom, and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they shall do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth*

forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, SERM.
and had servants born in my house: also I VII.
had great possessions of great and small
cattle above all that were in Jerusalem be-
fore me: I gathered me also silver and
gold and the peculiar treasure of Kings
and of the provinces: I gat me men-singers
and women-singers and the delights of the
sons of men, as musical instruments, and
that of all sorts. So I was great, and in-
creased more than all that were before me
in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained
with me. And whatsoever mine eyes de-
sired I kept not from them: I withheld not
my heart from any joy: for my heart rejoiced
in all my labour; and this was my portion
of all my labour. Then I looked on all the
works that my hands had wrought, and on
the labour that I had laboured to do; and
behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit;
and there was no profit under the sun[d].

Very different is the character which he gives of Religion under the name of Wisdom: *Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is*

[d] Eccles ii. 1—11.

SERM. VII. *more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour, Her ways are ways of pleasantness; and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retaineth her*[e].—And therefore from his own experience he recommends an early application to this prime concern of man. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them*[f]. Hence he offers this advice as the result and conclusion of all his preaching; *Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole* duty or concern *of man:* it is his chief business here, because it will produce his happiness hereafter. *For God will bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil*[g].

It is to be lamented that so correct a judge of what is right should have fallen so egregiously into error in his practice; that notwithstanding his convic-

[e] Prov. iii. 13—18. [f] Eccles xii. 1.
[g] Eccles xii. 13, 14.

tion

tion of what was substantially good and most conducive to his final peace, he should have surrendered himself to those idolatrous and immoral practices, which he found in the end to be productive only of vanity and vexation of spirit. Yet hence we may draw this instructive lesson, that the wise man should not glory in his wisdom, nor the mighty man in his might, nor the rich man in his riches[h]; for all these endowments without the concurring grace of God are of no avail in maintaining his integrity against the several temptations which attend on human life. Whatever be the station that we hold in society, whatever be the qualities which recommend us to the notice of the world, we may learn from this example to distrust those advantages in which we make our boast, and to look with diffidence and humility on our own qualifications and attainments. Thus rendered sensible of our own insufficiency, we shall be put upon our guard against those temptations which most easily beset us, and we shall be disposed to repair in supplication to the throne of grace for wisdom to direct and

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[h] Jer. ix. 23.

SERM. VII. for strength to support us through the pilgrimage of life.

That Solomon so distinguished for wisdom should fall into folly, so favoured of the God of Israel should labour to forget him, is a most deplorable instance of human frailty. But if we see cause of offence in his lapse from God and goodness, the offence is in some degree removed, if we look to the conduct of his latter days. He lived to be sensible of his follies, to repent of his errors, and to amend his life. After giving himself for a time to other Gods, in the end he returned unto the Lord.

But would we avail ourselves of a clearer and less exceptionable Guide, the Gospel points our attention to a greater and wiser than Solomon, even to the Prophet of the Christian dispensation; whose doctrine was the whole counsel of God, and whose example in every point illustrates and improves his doctrine.

The arguments used by Solomon for the choice and cultivation of wisdom seem to have a principal reference to the present life; though indeed he closes his discourse with an express acknowledgement of a future judgement

as

as the most prevailing motive for a wise and proper choice. That he does not more closely and more copiously insist upon the recompence of another life must be imputed to the dimness of the divine light under the revelation of the Law. During that economy this important article of faith was a Treasure hid in a field, was a Pearl of great price not yet duly estimated. It was reserved for the Author and Finisher of our faith to bring this Treasure forth to light, to disclose the worth of this inestimable Pearl to the knowledge of the world. He hath opened unto us the treasures of divine grace: he hath expanded heaven to our view, and proposed it for the object of our ambition and desire. Here are pleasures altogether pure; here are riches incorruptible; here are honours of transcending worth: they are all excellent in degree, and in duration they never have an end.

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Nor is he disposed in the common order of Providence to abridge us of any genuine good upon earth, while he offers us an incomparably superior happiness in heaven. For *godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and also of that which is*

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SERM. VII. *to come*[1]. While the man of pleasure is giving himself up to indulgences that must end in pain; while the covetous man is heaping up riches that cannot profit; while the ambitious man is pursuing a phantom that continually evades his grasp; the truly religious man is establishing for himself a good foundation of happiness both in time and eternity. Unannoyed with those pangs which immoderate pleasures bring on the body, those cares which attend an inordinate love of riches, those fears and jealousies which perplex and haunt the walks of ambition, he is provided with more certain means of preserving health to the body and peace to the mind. Undisturbed by the reflexion, that he has sacrificed his integrity to any worldly pursuit, he retains the approbation of his own conscience, and he humbly hopes for acceptance with his God.

When so great are the blessings resulting from the purchase of this inestimable pearl, it is most beneficial counsel which our Saviour gives in his Sermon on the Mount, that we be not fretfully solicitous after the goods, as they are called, of this present life, that we *take no immoderate*

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

thought,

thought, what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or wherewithal we shall be clothed. For after all these things did the Gentiles seek: they were anxious to make the most of this life, because they had no firm trust in Providence, and no sure confidence in a life to come. But Christians have better notions of God from the light, which he has imparted in the gospel, and more comfortable hopes for themselves, which are grounded on certain promises. And therefore instead of being painfully solicitous like the children of this world for the mammon of unrighteousness, our Lord continues to exhort us, *But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you*[k]. If our principal concern be given to our eternal interest, the providence of God will supply what is convenient for us in this life. He will either shed a blessing on our temperate pursuit after worldly goods; or if he sees cause in his unerring wisdom not to grant us what the world accounts the good things of life, he will take care in the end to make us abundant compen-

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[k] Matt. vi. 31, &c.

sation,

SERM. VII. sation. For what we lose on earth we shall gain ten thousand fold in heaven. For though godliness is in general followed by a temporal recompence, yet in the present state of discipline this is not invariably the case. It may sometimes happen to us, as was the general fate of the primitive Disciples, that we may be exposed to temporal evils even for righteousness' sake. Now whenever we find a competition of service between God and Mammom, we are to yield ourselves intirely servants unto God: whenever there is a competition of interest between Heaven and Earth, we are to set our affections on the things of Heaven.

In the ordinary course of things we are seldom put to so severe a trial. Our duty and our interest are for the most part in harmony. So far is our Religion from forbidding all pursuit of worldly wealth, or all enjoyment of those good things which worldly wealth procures, that it rather encourages a diligent application to our temporal callings, and a sober and temperate use of those good things which the providence of God either bestows without our care, or supplies upon our industry.

It

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It was the Apostles' admonition that we mind our own business[l], and that we provide for our own household[m]. And as it is a duty in itself to do our part in life and to fill our station in society, so also is it conducive to the better discharge of all other duties whether social or divine; since it most effectually guards us from those temptations, to which a state of idleness would expose us, and it naturally forms us to those habits of sobriety and diligence, which are favourable to the growth of pious sentiments and the cultivation of religious exercises.

Thus also was it the advice of the Psalmist, that we taste and see how gracious the Lord is[n]. By supplying us freely with the good things of his providence he virtually invites us to enjoy them. And by enjoying his bounties we virtually acknowledge him for the Fountain of goodness; thus we become disposed to pay him in return the incense of our gratitude; and while we offer him the praises of our lips, to yield him also the homage of our hearts and the service of our lives.

[l] 1 Thess. iv. 11. [m] 1 Tim. v. 8. [n] Psal. xxxiv. 8.

But

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But while Religion encourages a temperate application in the pursuit of worldly wealth, and while it recommends a temperate use of those good things which worldly wealth procures, it discountenances an inordinate pursuit after riches, and an extravagant attachment to the comforts and conveniences of life; because this is apt to withdraw our minds from the search after that goodly Pearl, which is of greater price than rubies, and by necessary consequence to impede or hinder our attainment of that heavenly Treasure, which is of higher value than all the Kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Whatever else we seek, we are first to seek the Kingdom of God; whatever else we dispose of, we are first to secure a place in this Inheritance: for this administers a peace, which the world cannot give[o]; this provides a joy, which no man can take from us[p].

[o] John xiv. 27. [p] John xvi. 22.

The Prudent Householder.

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In conducting a series of discourses on the Parables, it may be proper at the close of this discourse to take some cursory notice of that short Similitude, with which our Saviour finishes his present conversation. This also relates to that Economy, of which he had been discoursing in parables, and which he repeatedly stiles the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus saith unto his Disciples, *Have ye understood all these things?* With the assistance he had given they were competent to say, they had. Hereupon he said unto them, *Therefore every Scribe, which is instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven, is like unto a Man that is a Householder, who bringeth forth of his treasure things new and old*[q].

A Scribe among the Jews was one professing to teach the law of Moses. a Scribe instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven is one who is competent to teach the doctrines of the gospel. A Person of this description, who freely

[q] Matt. xiii. 51, 52.

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imparts to others all that store of spiritual knowledge which he has attained himself, is compared to a prudent Householder, who produces, employs, and improves all kind of store both new and old.

Such was the character of Christ himself as a Teacher of righteousness; especially when he spoke in parables. By similitudes from the Old economy of Nature he described realities in the New economy of Grace. By the types and shadows in the Old dispensation of the Law he illustrated substantial truths in the New dispensation of the Gospel. And this mode of teaching he recommends to his Disciples, when they should become sufficiently instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven.

And that they followed this injunction in their practice Saint Paul affords a memorable example. For thus he states his method of teaching the gospel; *Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more: unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law*

as without law, that I might gain them that are without law; to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some[r]. This does not at all imply, that he made any sacrifice of principle in accommodating himself to the various characters and opinions, which he must have encountered in his extensive ministry. But in preaching the truths of the gospel through the world he assumed by way of argument or illustration those different modes of thinking, that prevailed among those to whom he either spoke or wrote. SERM. VII.

Thus in his Epistle to the Hebrews he at large illustrates the whole economy of the great Atonement, the leading article of the Christian Faith, by the most solemn ritual of the Mosaic Ordinance. As the High Priest under the Law first offered upon the altar a sacrifice for sin, and then going up into the Holy place within the veil, presented the blood of that sacrifice before the mercy-seat by way of atonement for the Children of Israel: so Christ our great High Priest offered himself upon

[r] 1 Cor. ix. 19, &c.

SERM. VII. the cross a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, and then ascended into the most Holy place, not made with hands, even into Heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God on our behalf, and on the merit of his precious blood to make a continual intercession for us[*].

Thus also in his discourse to the inquisitive Athenians he draws his arguments from what they saw in the face of nature, and what they might infer from the light of reason; that the Creator of the world must have the superintendence of his own work; that he must of course take cognizance of the moral conduct of mankind; and as they do not meet with an adequate recompence of good and evil in this life, that he has reserved a fulness of recompence for another life. In the conduct of this argument the Apostle does not scruple to quote the words of their own Poets, and to assume the sentiments of their own Philosophers. Having thus on their own positions established the credibility of a life to come, he now proceeds to declare an assurance of it as

[*] Heb. vii, viii, ix.

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an immediate revelation from above. He preaches unto them the doctrine, which they had shewn some curiosity to understand, of Jesus and the Resurrection: and he urges upon all, to whom this revelation comes, repentance and amendment of life on this most prevailing motive, *Because God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead*[t].

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In this sense we may understand it was, that he became all things to all men, that he might by all means save some. And thus does he exemplify the instruction of his divine Master, while he extends an example also himself to every other Christian Teacher.

Thus we see how the parable may apply as a maxim of instruction to every Teacher or Minister of the word in the Church of Christ, who is no other than a Scribe instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven. From this im-

[t] Acts xvii. 16, &c.

SERM. VII. plied admonition he may infer this general rule of conduct in his Christian ministry; that he diligently study and patiently inculcate every branch of gospel truth without exception or reservation; that he adopt every method in his power to urge upon his flock what they have to do in this life, and what they have to look for in the life to come; that he instil the principles of religion in the Young, and stir up the remembrance of the Old; that he teach his hearers what they have yet to learn, and enforce upon them what they already know; that he implant in their hearts the vital principles of Christian doctrine, and impress on their lives an habitual exercise of Christian duty; that he admonish to repentance for past sins, and exhort to amendment for the time to come; that he point out the way of truth in precept, and display it in example. Thus after the pattern of his blessed Master will he shew himself a prudent Scribe, bringing forth of his spiritual treasures things new and old; and being well instructed himself may instruct others also unto the Kingdom of Heaven. By such an application to the work of his ministry he

he may secure his own acceptance, and contribute to the final welfare of those, whom the great Shepherd of the Flock has committed to his charge. And thus when all things old are come to an end, he may be received into that new heaven and that new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness[u].

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[u] 2 Pet iii. 13.

SERMON VIII.

THE PRIEST, THE LEVITE, AND THE SAMARITAN.

LUKE x. 37.

Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise.

IN different parts of this chapter our Saviour takes occasion to speak of that great article of his religion, the Recompence of another life. When he sent his Disciples two and two before his face, the topic of their preaching was to be, *The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you;* in other words, that dispensation of the Gospel is now revealed unto you, which bringeth life and immortality to light. And when on their return they expressed their joy for those miraculous powers, which in warrant of their

SERM. VIII.

SERM. VIII. mission they had been enabled to display, he gave them this salutary caution; *Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the Spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.*

In the same vein of sentiment he pronounced upon his Disciples this benediction; *Blessed are the eyes, which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many Prophets and Righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.* In seeing the miracles, and in hearing the doctrines, of their divine Master they were blessed above the greatest and the wisest men under all preceding dispensations: for whatever they saw was an evidence, and whatever they heard was an argument, of that eternal life, of which he brought an assurance to the world.

We are not hence to imagine, that the ancient Prophets and Kings under the Law had little or no hope of a future life: for if that had been the case, they would not have been so solicitous for a fuller communication of divine knowledge. Though this doctrine had not been

been expressly and positively revealed unto them, yet availing themselves of that inferior light which God was pleased for a season to impart, they accepted the temporal promises of their Law as types of better things to come; and that political Kingdom, which God established for the Jews upon earth, they regarded as a pledge and emblem of a spiritual Kingdom, which he had reserved for the faithful in heaven. Hence at the time of our Saviour's coming in the flesh this doctrine had gained considerable ground among the Jews: it was strenuously maintained by the Pharisees; it was professionally taught by the Scribes or Lawyers; and except by the Sadducees, a sect comparatively small, it was received as an article of faith by the great body of the Jewish nation. SERM. VIII.

But whatever might be their hopes, it was reserved for a fuller dispensation than that of Moses and the Prophets, to establish them upon certain grounds. The great and powerful motive of our Saviour's teaching was the recompence of another life.

It seems to have been in consequence of his dwelling on this important doctrine,

SERM. VIII. trine, that a certain Lawyer stood up and tempted him, or put him to the trial, saying; *Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* Our Lord refers him for an answer to that word, which he made the subject of his professional studies and inquiries; *What is written in the Law? How readest thou?* The Lawyer hereupon rehearses out of the Law the two great duties toward God and toward Man; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind; and thy Neighbour as thyself.* And Jesus said unto him, *Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.*

But he willing to justify himself, both in doctrine and in practice, *said unto Jesus, And who is my Neighbour?* It was too much the manner of the Lawyers and Pharisees to contract the spirit of the divine law by too literal an interpretation; and thus, while they affected a high degree of deference to the commandment of God, they in reality made it of none effect. It may readily be supposed, that the Lawyer had imbibed the common prejudice of his order, by which he became indisposed to

receive the clear and open truth. We may therefore understand it to have been out of a prudent and considerate regard to the sentiments of his Auditor that our Saviour chose to convey his answer in a parable. SERM. VIII.

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Though neither his Country nor Religion is expressed, yet from the road on which he passed, as well as from the circumstance on which the parable is grounded, we may suppose him to have been of the stock and faith of Israel. *And as he travelled, he fell among thieves; who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half-dead.* Thus oppressed by calamity he was a moving object of compassion to all who should light upon him. *And by chance there came down a certain Priest that way:* a man devoted to the service of God we might expect would manifest a reverence for his will in the opportunity now given of putting in practice one of his great commandments: yet the extent of his charity was no more than this; *He came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite,* one who also ministered in the service of the sanctuary, *when*

SERM. VIII. *when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.*

As the functions of these two Ministers of religion imply some acquaintance with the will of him they served, we may here be disposed to ask, how they could possibly satisfy their own conscience for thus flagrantly neglecting a law, which held so conspicuous a place in the roll of moral precepts. If this object of compassion had been an alien from their country, and a stranger to their religion, they possibly might have pleaded in their own behalf, that he was not the Neighbour whom they were required to love. But supposing him to have been a Jew, he had every claim from the law of Moses to be regarded as a Neighbour, and on the plea of that relation to be treated with every hospitable care.

The most reasonable excuse which we can imagine in their behalf is, either that they were straitened in their time by the stated services of their respective orders, or that they did not chuse to incur any risk of disqualifying themselves for their ministerial functions. For if they administered relief, he might possibly die in their hands; and in consequence

sequence of touching a dead body they would according to their law be rendered for a time unclean. If such was their plea for passing by on the other side, they forgot that moral duties had a prior and superior obligation to all positive institutions; as was abundantly testified by the mouth of their own Prophets, who combine in declaring, that the Lord desireth mercy rather than sacrifice, and that he delights not in cleanness of hands unless accompanied with purity of heart. SERM. VIII.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: as being of a nation who lived under a corrupted creed, he had less opportunities of knowing the will of God than a Jew, not to bring him in comparison with a Priest and a Levite. Yet *when he saw him, he had compassion and went to him, and bound up his wounds pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed he took out two pence and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.*

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SERM. VIII. The charitable service of this Samaritan was more deserving approbation, because he could be no stranger to the dissensions, that subsisted between his own nation and that of the sufferer whom he relieved. For at the supposed time of this event the animosities between them were grown to such a height that *the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans*[a]. But when the distress occurred, he considered only a Fellow-creature under affliction and in want of immediate relief. He neither suspended his compassion, till he had satisfied himself whether the Sufferer had a title to the charitable treatment of a Neighbour; nor drew in his hand on discovering him to be of a different country and religion from his own; for he continued to provide for the cure of his wounds and the supply of his necessities, as long as he stood in need of assistance and support.

Thus did the Samaritan put in practice that great commandment of the Law, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.* Though heretical in the letter, he was orthodox in the spirit: though

[a] John iv. 9.

erroneous

erroneous in the form, he was upright in the power of godliness. Whatever were the errors of his creed or his ritual, in the essentials of religion he stood superior to the Priest and the Levite: and thus in the knowledge and the practice of a great commandment he was competent to yield a lesson of instruction to a Teacher of the Law. SERM. VIII.

An intimation so repugnant to the prejudice of the Jews in general, would be still more unwelcome to a man in the station of the Lawyer, who valued himself on his professional knowledge of the Law, and arrogated merit in being one of those, who sat in Moses' seat and interpreted the oracles of God. Accustomed as he must have been to regard his own nation as a distinguished and peculiar people, and brought up in an habitual reverence for the Mosaic ministry, he would be unpleasantly surprized in hearing a narrative so little to the credit of a Priest or a Levite, so much to the honour of a Samaritan. But when our Saviour puts the question home to his impartial conscience, *Which now of these three thinkest thou was Neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?* his natural sense of right compels him

to

SERM. VIII. to acknowledge, *He that shewed mercy on him.* In spite of national and professional prejudice he cannot but assent to this persuasive illustration of our holy Teacher; who accordingly applies this closing admonition, *Go and do thou likewise.*

THIS Parable illustrates and exemplifies that great commandment of God which is common to the Law and the Gospel, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.* It explains its nature, by shewing, that it must be rooted in our hearts, and grounded in our lives: and it directs its object, by requiring us to consider all mankind, without respect of nation or profession of faith, in that affectionate relation.

To consider the nature of this commandment; whatever gloss the Scribes or Lawyers might put upon it, we here behold the clear exposition of one, who came from God and knew his will. And would we obey it in the spirit of the divine Lawgiver, we must love, not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth[b]. It is of no ac-

[b] 1 John iii. 18.

count

count in the eye of heaven to profess a love of our Neighbour, unless it comprehends a cordial aim to please God and to benefit Man. A love so principled will necessarily manifest itself in action: it will make us anxious to step out of our way to promote the good of all we meet in the road of human life: it will engage us in the exercise of all those acts of charity, which we have frequent opportunities to practise; and it will induce us freely to make a sacrifice of our time and ease and substance, to relieve the sufferings and improve the comforts of our fellow-creatures. SERM. VIII.

The means of expressing this love are as various and manifold, as are the distresses and wants of human nature.—If our Neighbour is oppressed by poverty; if he is overtaken by some sudden and unforeseen calamity; if he is reduced to distress by a train of evil fortune, or even by his own imprudence; if he is afflicted in body, or depressed in mind; religion calls upon us to assist and solace and support him. We should not merely look upon him, and pass by on the other side; but we should step out of our way, and submit to inconvenience and expence, to relieve his

SERM. VIII. necessities, to soothe and mitigate his afflictions.

If our Neighbour is distressed in his spiritual state, religion calls upon us to administer spiritual medicine in his sickness. If he lies under a callous insensibility to his danger; as a way to restore him to spiritual health we should probe his wounds, awaken him to a sense of his danger, and move him to repentance and amendment of life. If he groans under a wounded spirit, and is troubled with an afflicted conscience, we should endeavour to mitigate his fears by displaying the mercies of God to the truly penitent. This it is to act like the benevolent Samaritan, to bind up his wounds pouring in oil and wine.

In the exercise of this love there are continual claims upon us: but the claims increase in proportion both to our Neighbour's needs, and our own abilities to relieve them.

In regard to our Neighbour's needs, whenever the distress is deep or the danger imminent, there certainly is a stronger claim for every charitable service. Such indeed was the case of the Traveller in this narration: he was stripped of his raiment and wounded

and left half-dead. On such an occa- SERM.
sion the neglect of the Priest and the VIII.
Levite was highly reprehensible; espe-
cially since the Sufferer could not help himself, and without the assistance of some well-disposed mind must undoubtedly have died upon the road.

In regard to men's abilities to administer relief, it is the maxim of religion, that where much has been given, much also will be required. Such probably was the case of the Priest and the Levite. For both these orders of men the Law of Moses had made a liberal provision in the tithe of all the land; sufficient not only to administer every worldly comfort to themselves, but according to the purpose of the divine Disposer to supply them also with some superfluity for acts of kindness to the poor and unfortunate; the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. The neglect was therefore much more culpable in them, than it would have been in others, who possessed not equal means of dispensing benefits.

Through this uncertain pilgrimage of life we are subject like the Traveller in this parable to misfortunes and afflictions of various kinds. To palliate this

SERM. VIII. inevitable doom, it is the design of a wise and good Providence, that man should depend on man for mutual comfort and assistance. It is the duty of the strong to support the weak, of the whole to relieve the wounded, of those who are in health to solace those who are in sickness. If our path is prosperous and easy, the greater is the claim upon us to give a helping hand to those, whose course is adverse and unfortunate. As we hope to be accepted at our journey's end, we should bear one another's burdens, and support one another on the way.

To this love of our Neighbour we are earnestly invited by the love of God to us. The love of God to man may be seen in the economy of nature; wherein it is evident to a slight observation, that *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*[c]. Of this a Samaritan had an equal power of observation with a Priest and a Levite. But this is more distinctly shewn by the light of religion. For even under the comparatively dark and severe dispensation of the Law God proclaimed him-

[c] Psalm cxlv. 9.

self

self to Moses, *The Lord merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*[d]. In this point of view the Priest and the Levite had far better opportunities of knowing God in his attribute of love than a Samaritan; and therefore in their neglect of copying this divine example they would have been more inexcuseable. SERM. VIII.

But whatever knowledge of this attribute might be derived from the light of nature, or the Mosaic revelation, it was above all degree of comparison manifested in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Herein we learn that *God is love*[e]; or to give a special instance of this benevolence to men, we are instructed by our Lord himself, that *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*[f].

Or if we cannot sufficiently comprehend the love of a Being immaterial and invisible, it is embodied to us in

[d] Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. [e] 1 John iv. 8.
[f] John iii. 16.

SERM. VIII. the person of the Son of God; who for the sake of man, even when fallen from his primitive innocence and separated from the countenance of heaven, vouchsafed to leave the bosom of the Father, submitted to assume our nature, to bear our sorrows, to sustain our infirmities, and after leading a life of indigence and labour in our service, completed the measure of unexampled love by yielding his life a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Surely never has there been so great an instance, never can there be so bright a pattern of love to mankind. Greater love than this can no man shew, that a man lay down his life for his Friends[g]. But even while we were Enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; while we were sinners, Christ died for us[h]. If therefore there was a greater claim for the exercise of this duty from a Priest and a Levite than from a Samaritan or a Gentile, because they had better notions of the love of God to man; surely there are greater claims upon the poorest and most unlettered Christians than on the most

[g] John xv. 13. [h] Rom. v. 8, 10.

learned

learned and most sacred orders of the Jews, because they acknowledge an incomparably greater sense of benefits received. After a display of such unbounded love to men as our Lord hath shewn, even if there were no obligation upon us by any positive law, it would certainly become us highly to manifest every mark of gratitude to Christ, by loving our Brethren even as he hath loved us, and by extending our charity to all those, to whom in common with ourselves he has given so stupendous an example of benevolence. SERM. VIII.

After thus considering the nature of that love, which the law of our religion enjoins us to pay to our Neighbour, we are in the second place to consider who the Neighbour is, to whom we are required to pay it. Now it was the chief object of this parable to inculcate, as was evident to the Lawyer for whose instruction it was spoken, that we are not to restrict this relation of a Neighbour according to the notions of that order among the Jews to those who are connected with us by a common bond of nation or religion; but we are to extend it to all mankind of every

SERM. VIII. faith and country under heaven. Wherever there is a scope for the exercise of our charity, we are called upon to exercise it without exception or reservation.

The neglect of the Priest and the Levite was the more reprehensible, because in defiance of their law, which they professed a zeal to reverence and obey, they omitted the exercise of this love even towards one of their own faith and country. On the other hand the active benevolence of the Samaritan was the more acceptable both in the sight of God and in the sentiments of men, because even under an imperfect and defective knowledge of the divine law he administered relief to one of a hostile country and another creed. In this he humanely followed the natural dictates of reason, while they uncharitably slighted the express injunctions of religion.

To move us to this law of social love we have the united claims of reason and the gospel. Our reason teaches, that we are all descended from the same common Parent, and are all partakers of the same common nature. For God *hath made of one blood all nations of men for*

for to dwell on all the face of the earth[i]. Our religion teaches, that we are all the sons of God by adoption in Christ Jesus, that we are all partakers in the same common promises of grace, that we have all a common interest in an inheritance of glory. Thus both in nature and in grace all mankind are brethren; and by reason of this common bond we ought to treat one another with the charities of brethren. SERM. VIII.

And the duty thus inculcated by the tender relations, which we bear to one another, is powerfully supported by that impartial and universal love, which God extends to man.

We learn from the book of nature, that God impartially distributes fertile rains and fruitful seasons over all the nations of the earth. Thus when our Lord enjoins the love, not only of our Neighbours in the common acceptation of the Jews, but even of our Enemies, he assigns this argument from the providence of God as manifested in his works, *That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he causeth his sun to rise on the evil and on*

[i] Acts xvii. 26.

the

SERM. VIII. *the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust* [k].

And again we learn from the book of revelation, that God is no respecter of persons in the distribution of his spiritual gifts. Though the knowledge of his will was limited for a season to the house of Israel, yet as soon as our Saviour came, the partition wall was broken down between Jew and Gentile. In consequence of which all mankind *through him have access by one Spirit unto the Father: now therefore they are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the Saints and of the household of God* [l]. Accordingly the Apostle gives this character of God our Saviour in the gospel dispensation, that he *will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all* [m].

Being thus united to one another in every endearing bond both of nature and of grace, it becomes us to regard all mankind as brethren, and notwith-

[k] Matt. v. 45.
[l] Eph. ii. 18, 19. [m] 1 Tim. ii. 4, 5, 6.

standing

standing the several distinctions and varieties of men in manners and complexion, and language and religion, to treat them all with the charities of that relation. For whatever be the civil or political distinctions under which we fall, or whatever be the modifications of religious doctrine or discipline that make divisions among us, the voice of Reason dictates universal love: and if her voice is overpowered by the calls of passion or interest, the Gospel of our blessed Lord commands it in a tone of language too strong for passion to suppress, too clear for schism to misinterpret. SERM. VIII.

It must be admitted, that as the providence of God has distributed mankind into various degrees of relation, so it has accordingly adjusted the scale of our affections towards one another. For as we are bound together by the several relations of family, of country, and of species, so we also acknowledge and experience a long gradation of benevolence from the lively charities of kindred to the more comprehensive sympathies of human nature. While we feel and encourage a benevolence for those who partake in the same common

SERM. VIII. mon nature, we are more closely attached to those who live in the same civil society, and who profess the same religious faith: and we bear a still warmer affection for those of our own kindred and our own household. And though the gospel dwells more largely on general than on special charity, yet by occasionally insisting on the relative duties of domestic life, it clearly intimates, that every relation has its corresponding duty through the great household and family of the world.

By this economy the poor and distressed of every clime are placed within their proper sphere of friends; to whom they may impart their sorrows, on whom they may repose their cares, and to whom in their several troubles and afflictions they may look for consolation and relief. In this more contracted sphere of neighbourhood we have opportunities every day to put in practice the duty of social love. For the poor we have always with us; and the afflictions of our more immediate Neighbours have continual claims on our benevolence.

But from this disposition of things we can by no means draw a reasonable

plea,

plea, to contract our charity within the limits of our kindred, or even of our country, when there are urgent calls upon us from remoter objects. Such calls indeed do not frequently occur: and calls for extensive aid can occur only on extraordinary emergencies in the case of some natural calamity or some civil commotion. But whenever they do occur, our hearts are to be opened and our hands are to be stretched out according to our several means and abilities. It is then incumbent on us, that we make no respect of country or profession of faith. For however we may differ in the manner and habit of our journey, the object of our pilgrimage is the same to all, to arrive at the City of the living God, to finish our course in the Jerusalem of Heaven. SERM. VIII.

Thus we see how well the parable is designed to illustrate and exemplify that great commandment of God, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.* It teaches who our Neighbour is, and how we are to love him.

Do we need any further motive or argument to open our hearts and hands in dispositions and acts of charity.

SERM. VIII. charity than the precept and example of our blessed Lord; it behoves us to look to the certain recompence of another life, when he will come a second time to visit us, not as a Prophet, to instruct us in our duty; nor as a Priest, to shew his love in offering up his life a ransom for us; but as a King, to reward or punish us according as we have obeyed or neglected his commandments. And on the practice or omission of no duty has he laid a greater stress in determining our final doom, than on that of charity to our fellow-creatures. For in the figurative description which he has given us of that aweful day, when he shall appear unto the world in the character of a Judge, he dwells upon this duty as the principal, and as it were the only test of man's obedience: and according as men have performed or neglected the various offices of brotherly love, he pronounces upon them all the final and irreversible sentence of happiness or misery [n].

It is rather by a filial love, than by a servile fear, that he would gain us to himself: it is rather by his mercies than

[n] Matt. xxv. 31, &c.

by his terrors, that he would win us to his service. The purpose of his coming was to declare the grace of God, which bringeth salvation to all men. And though it was expedient for him to denounce indignation and wrath upon the rebellious and impenitent, yet he takes most complacence in unfolding the treasures of divine grace to such as repent of their sins and continue patient in well-doing. Thus the subject of discourse through the whole of this chapter is that eternal life, of which he brought an assurance to the world. This is stated as the recompence ordained for the faithful observance of those two great and comprehensive duties, the love of God and the love of our Neighbour.

SERM. VIII.

It is not indeed very clearly shewn, wherein this promised blessedness consists: for *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things, which God hath prepared for them that love him*[a]. Yet some intimation he hath been pleased to give us of the future happiness of the righteous, when he states by his Apostle that they shall *come unto*

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 9.

Mount

SERM. VIII. *Mount Sion, and unto the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of Angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant*[p]. Thus the happiness of the heavenly life, as far as we can comprehend in this imperfect state of knowledge, will principally consist in the blessed society of those, who best deserve and best can recompense their love. And herein we see an admirable correspondence between the duty and the reward. If we love the Lord our God with all our faculties, and our Neighbour as ourselves, our obedience upon earth will be infinitely recompensed in heaven by the love of God and all the blessed Saints to us. And what can we conceive to be a greater possible happiness, than to be received of those Angels, who have watched round our dwellings, and have ministered to us in the ways of salvation[q]; to be called to an eternal fellowship with the spirits of just men made perfect; to converse with that Saviour,

[p] Heb. xii. 22, &c. [q] Heb. i. 14.

who

who has loved us so much as to lay down his life for our sakes; to stand before that great King, in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore[r]. SERM. VIII.

When once we cast our eyes on that eternal life, which is proposed for the recompence of our obedience in loving God and loving our Neighbour, our present life must wane in our esteem, and we cannot regard ourselves in any other light than as Strangers and Pilgrims upon earth; who are, or ought to be, in quest of a better country, that is a heavenly[s]. This image is frequently brought forward in the holy scriptures, to wean us from too strong an attachment to earthly things, and to fix our attention on the concerns of another life. Nor can it better forward the great business of our calling, than to bring into comparison the short and uncertain tenure of all worldly possessions with that permanent and eternal reward, which is promised to all those who keep the commandments.

But notwithstanding that we know all this, that we profess to be directing our

[r] Psalm xvi. 11. [s] Heb. xi. 13, 16.

SERM. VIII. journey to a better country, that we desire to secure to ourselves a final home in Heaven, we seem in general too much taken up with the amusements and avocations of the road, to pay a due attention to the progress and end of our pilgrimage. And therefore God, who is merciful even in his corrections, has been pleased in diverse manners and at sundry times to give us aweful mementos of the frailty and instability of all sublunary fortune.

An example is every day before us in the fate of those foreign Exiles, who, driven from their country by political convulsions, are Strangers and Pilgrims in our land. But a little time is past since they had riches, houses, friends, a country, and a home. On a sudden all are vanished like a vision of the night; they are cast out into the wilderness of the world, and depend upon the benevolence of another people for their daily bread.

Whether this visitation is come upon them for the correction of their sins, or the trial of their patience, it would be arrogance in us to judge. Suffice it for us to know, that we may render their adversity beneficial to ourselves, if we accept

accept it as a warning to religious meditation and repentance. Let their vicissitude of fortune be a caution to us, that we do not place our confidence on the precarious and perishable things of this life, but that we put our trust in God alone, in whose hands are the destinies of mankind, and who dispenses his mercies and his judgements according as he sees most conducive to the purposes of his good providence. SERM. VIII.

It is not for our merits, but of his mercies, that he continues to us, what so many of our Neighbours now deplore as lost, the benefits of established government and the blessings of a Country. If God were extreme to mark what is done amiss, and to pay us as we deserve, we could alledge no plea for an exemption from the same calamity. But supposing that he will continue gracious to us, and that we shall enjoy these first of blessings without interruption or impair; yet let us remember still, that we have one certain and unremitting token of the frailty and instability of all worldly things. The hand of Death never takes any rest: multitudes fall every day before us; and sooner or later we must fall our-

SERM. VIII. selves: when our riches, houses, friends will no longer attend us; when our country and our home must entirely cease to us, and a very different scene will open upon us in another life, substantial, unchangeable, and eternal.

When the tenure of our fortunes is so loose and fugitive upon earth, what vanity does it shew, what vexation of spirit will it produce in consequence, to set our affections on the things of earth, to place our confidence on such transitory friends! Instead of such a choice, religion dictates to us the only true wisdom, that we set our affections on the things above, and that we dispose of our perishable wealth on earth, in making to ourselves a never-failing Friend in heaven, in providing for ourselves an everlasting habitation in that blessed inheritance, where alone our joys will be full, and where alone we shall be completely satisfied.

If these considerations have a claim to regard in all Christian States, more especially should they have an influence on the People of this Land; as being blest above other nations

tions with a larger portion of the gifts of Providence, both Natural, Civil, and Religious. SERM. VIII.

If we look to our Natural gifts, an indulgent Providence has cast our lot in a fair land, and given us a goodly heritage[t]. We are placed in a temperate climate, where the sun and the rain in their general influence are ministers and dispensers both of health and nutriment; where the earth supplies us liberally with all the necessaries of life; while an ocean rolls around our land, which brings us the various produce of other climes, at the same time that it guards us effectually from all hostile annoyances.

If we look to our Civil advantages, we are placed in a realm, unannoyed like all the neighbouring nations with the miseries of battle, insurrection, and anarchy; though there is war in the gates, there still is peace in Israel: and we enjoy the inheritance of a Constitution, which extends to high and low, to rich and poor, to Master and Servant, to Prince and People, the benefits of mutual protection and support, and the

[t] Psalm xvi. 6.

SERM. VIII. blessings of true liberty beyond all other nations.

If we look to our Religious endowments, we are blest with a knowledge of religious principles above most of the nations who profess the true Catholic Faith. And while a perfect liberty of conscience is extended to all the people of the land to worship God in the way which they believe is best, we are provided with an excellent form of worship; wherein we are called in the presence of God "to acknowledge and "confess our sins, to render thanks for "the great benefits that we have re- "ceived at his hands, to set forth his "most worthy praise, to hear his most "holy word, and to ask those things "which are requisite and necessary as "well for the body as the soul."

Now according as Providence has been more indulgent to us in the several endowments both of nature and of grace, there is a greater claim upon us for a liberal and discreet application of them. As we have more abundant means both of knowing and of practising our duty, it is the more incumbent on us that we be grateful to *the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy;*

enjoy; and that we express our gratitude by doing good; *that we be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate*[u]. SERM. VIII.

It is not for us to take merit to ourselves in complying with any branch of the Christian law. For even when we are most active in doing what is appointed us to do, we are no better than unprofitable servants; when we are most liberal in the exercises of benevolence, we are doing no more than refunding a portion of those good things, which the providence of God hath lent us as a trust, for which he will hereafter call us to account. Yet while we are taught to think humbly of ourselves, we are also taught to think charitably of others, especially when their actions exemplify the precepts of the gospel. Surely therefore our satisfaction is in harmony with a truly Christian temper, when we reflect with delight on the national character of our Countrymen for deeds of benevolence. Of this character there are abundant examples in all cases of distress, whether domestic or foreign. If we look for memorials

[u] 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.

SERM. VIII. among ourselves, we see Schools abounding for the gratuitous instruction of poor youth, and Alms-houses for the reception of distressed and indigent old age: we see Hospitals endowed for the relief of every want, and Infirmaries established for the cure or solace of every malady, whether of body or mind: for every natural distress or accidental calamity the hand of British charity has been ever open, whether it proceed from tempest, shipwreck, flood, or fire.

The compassion of our Countrymen has not been confined to the mitigation of domestic evil, but has been extended as liberally to the distresses of Foreigners, whether groaning under afflictions in their own country, or driven by misfortune to seek a refuge in another. I might instance the relief at different times administered in the case of those calamities, to which in our more favoured clime by an indulgent Providence we are strangers; such as famine and earthquake and hurricane. More especially would I notice that soothing and protecting aid, which our Countrymen have supplied to those that suffer for their principles, whether

whether in religious doctrine, or in civil government. SERM. VIII.

When the Protestants of France in a former age were obliged to flee from persecution on account of their faith, our Fathers opened their hospitable arms for their reception, admitted them to the privilege of fellow citizens, and gave them the blessing of a Country and a home.

Again, when the Royalists of France during the present convulsions of that unhappy State were obliged to flee from a Country distracted with anarchy, and polluted with massacre in every horrid and atrocious form, the present generation pursuing the laudable example of their Fathers received them with an active compassion into the bosom of their Country, and softened the rigours of unexpected poverty and exile by the seasonable interposal of a ready charity.

To this amiable feature of our national character let us all be assiduous to contribute in our private capacities: taking always especial care, that we do not exercise our benevolence out of ostentation, or to seek the praise of men, but out of that real love both to God

SERM. VIII. God and man, which our Religion proposes for the principle of our obedience. In the charity of our hearts as well as of our hands let us acknowledge no respect of persons. Whatever difference there may be in our speculations of civil government, in our several functions and capacities let us approve ourselves a City that is at unity with itself[w]. Whatever difference there may be among us in our sentiments of religious doctrine or discipline, by our Christian conversation let us testify to all, that we are a household of faith, compacted together in the unity of the spirit by the bond of peace[x].

If we thus fill our stations in a world, where schism and dissension are permitted to continue for a time, we shall minister to ourselves an entrance into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[y]; wherein all who have feared God and wrought righteousness[z], without respect of station, country, or profession of faith, whether Jew or Samaritan, Greek or

[w] Psal. cxxii. 3. [x] Eph. iv. 3. [y] 2 Pet. i. 11. [z] Acts x. 34, 35.

Bar-

Barbarian, Bond or Free, shall be received into the great Household and Family of the Faithful, shall be bound in one spirit, shall be animated with one soul, and though collected from different societies upon earth, shall constitute in Heaven One Fold under One Shepherd [a].

SERM. VIII.

[a] John x. 16.

SERMON

SERMON IX.

THE GREAT SUPPER.

LUKE XIV. 16, 17.

Then said he unto him; A certain Man made a great Supper, and bade many: and he sent his Servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready.

SERM. IX.

OUR Lord omitted no opportunities, while he sojourned on earth, of giving glory to God and of exercising good will to men. For this purpose he shewed a readiness of intercourse with all classes of men on all occasions and occurrences. Sometimes he resorted to the house of mourning, and sometimes to the house of feasting: at one time he sat down to meat with the Publicans, and at another time with the Pharisees.

But

SERM. IX. But whatever was the company with whom he conversed, or the occasion on which he associated with them, he never relaxed in his attention to the object of his mission; he still supported the character which he takes to himself, *My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work*[a]. By this readiness of intercourse he shewed the interest that he took in the welfare of mankind; while at the same time he procured more extensive opportunities of accomplishing that work for which he came into the world.

We read in the opening of this chapter, that he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day. The company on this occasion consisted of Lawyers and Pharisees, who did not look upon him with any friendly regard; for though they received him with the exteriors of civility, yet they kept a watch upon him in his conversation and demeanour. And behold a Man who had the dropsy came before him, with the hope of being healed of his complaint. Our Lord, observing that the eyes of the

[a] John iv. 34.

com-

company were upon him, and aware how strict and scrupulous they were in the observance of the sabbath, put this question to the Lawyers and Pharisees; *Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?* According to our natural sense of what is right we might conclude, that an act of essential good to man could not be rendered evil from its being performed on a day set apart for the service of God. Nor could any just objection lie against it from the positive injunctions of the Law of Moses, if they had understood the spirit of these injunctions as declared by the Prophet, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice*[b]. For what does this imply, but that God preferred the exercise of charity to a strict observance of any ritual institution? Indeed an act, which was evidently wrought by the finger of God, bore intrinsic evidence that it was agreeable to the will of God. But the company were less disposed to receive instruction than to find an occasion of cavil against the Teacher. Instead of giving any answer *they held their peace.* Hereupon SERM. IX.

[b] Hos. vi. 6.

our

SERM. IX. our Saviour *took the sick man and healed him and let him go.*

Though they continued silent while he performed this act of benevolence, yet he would not let the occasion pass without making one appeal to their customary practice. *Which of you shall have an ox or an ass fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?* The inference was evident. If they had no scruple to relieve an ox or an ass on the sabbath, they could have no reasonable objection to what he had now done in relieving a man of their stock and lineage from his infirmities. The argument was not to be controverted: and even if they had been disposed, *they could not answer him again to any of these things.*

This behaviour of his fellow-guests was by no means a favourable instance of their disposition toward him: yet he did not hesitate on that account to make a moral and religious improvement of every occurrence that arose, and of every sentiment that was uttered. When he marked how they chose out the chief rooms or places at the table, he put forth this parable to them; *When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not*

not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say, Friend, go up higher. Then shalt thou have worship with them that sit at meat with thee. SERM. IX.

If we understand this admonition literally, it recommends a respectful deference to others in society: but there is reason to accept it rather in a figurative sense. It is probable that the Pharisees, who attended more to the ceremonials than the essentials of duty, had taken their places according to the established forms of precedence. And though our Lord on another occasion was severe in his reproofs, because they loved the uppermost rooms at feasts and greetings in the market and to be called of men Rabbi[c]; yet it seems to have been his design, not to set aside the gradations and orders of social and civil life, but only to reprehend an assumption of

[c] Matt. xxiii. 6, 7.

SERM. IX. superior merit from their office or station in society. That this admonition is to be taken in a figurative sense may indeed be inferred from the words by which it is introduced, *He put forth a parable to them that were bidden.* By a mode of speech, that seemed to recommend humility of demeanour at the table of another man, he enjoined humility of heart toward God.

Hence we see the spirit of this admonition was, that instead of arrogating to themselves a superior degree of merit in their moral character, and expecting on that account a superior favour and regard of God, they should humble themselves in the sight of heaven, should examine their own hearts, confess their infirmities, and be thankful to God for his unmerited mercies and benefits. By such a change in their demeanour towards God and man they would render themselves more acceptable in the sight of heaven, and God would advance them higher in his favour and regard. Agreeable to this is that proverbial phrase, with which our Lord repeatedly closes his instructions to the same effect; *For whosoever exalteth himself shall be*

be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. SERM. IX.

WITH a lesson of humility our Lord would often unite, what they equally wanted, a lesson of charity. Having addressed one admonition in the form of parable to those that were bidden, he addressed another in somewhat plainer language to him who had bidden them. This was probably suggested by observing, that the company now assembled at his table consisted of his Friends and Equals, who were in a capacity to return his hospitalities: *When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy Friends nor thy Brethren, neither thy Kinsmen nor thy rich Neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed: for they cannot recompense thee; but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.*

This also, though not a parable, must be taken with some latitude of interpretation. It is a mode of language not uncommon in the holy scriptures, to state a proposition in positive terms,

SERM. IX. which is to be understood in a comparative sense. Thus in the words that I have newly quoted God declares by the Prophet, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice.* Now we are not here to suppose, that he disapproved of sacrifice from the hands of the Jews, for this he had expressly enjoined them to pay; but he would have mercy *rather* than sacrifice; he preferred a moral to a ceremonial service.

In like manner the object of his present instruction is not to discountenance all those habits of hospitable kindness, which are the customary links of social intercourse in the middle and superior stations of life; but to recommend hospitalities to the poor in preference. And this preference our Saviour justifies by a very powerful argument: for what they bestow upon the poor God himself will provide a recompence at the resurrection of the just.

When our Saviour spoke of a Resurrection, his language coincided with the sentiments of his Hearers. For though this doctrine was not universally received among the Jews, yet it was strenuously maintained by the Pharisees. Hence one of those that sat at meat

meat with him, on hearing these things said, *Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.* Always ready to improve the good suggestions which arose in conversation, our Lord pursued both the sentiment and image in a parable. SERM. IX.

A certain Man made a great Supper, and bade many. And he sent his Servant at supper-time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that Servant came and shewed his Lord these things. Then the Master of the house being angry said to his Servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind. And the Servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the Lord said unto the Servant, Go out unto the highways and hedges, and

SERM. IX. *compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*

UNDER this similitude we are to understand the benevolent economy of God, the Author and Dispenser of every good and perfect gift, who beside those bounties of his natural Providence, which he is every day diffusing on the world, has provided a far superior blessing in the dispensation of grace. The persons first invited to this feast of blessedness were the Jews. To them an early invitation was given by the Prophets: and the blessing being now fully prepared in its appointed season, it was expressly declared to them by the Minister of the New Covenant, *Come, for all things are now ready.* For such in effect was the tenour of his language, when he first began to preach; *The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; Repent ye, and believe the gospel*[d]. But the Jews were too much occupied with worldly cares to attend to the message which he came to im-

[d] Mark i. 15.

part.

part. Even those among them, who SERM. from their knowledge in divine concerns IX. and their professed acquaintance with the word of God, were better competent to appreciate this overture of heaven, the Pharisees and Lawyers, and the Chief Priests and Elders, were unhappily pre-engaged by the pleasures, the riches, and the honours of the world.

Being thus rejected of those to whom it was first offered; the invitation was extended to such as were scattered through the streets and lanes of the City or Commonwealth of Israel, to Publicans and Sinners, who were indeed derived from the same common stock of Abraham, and professed the same faith and worship with the general order of the Jews, but for some default in their observance of the ritual or the moral law were hardly admitted to the name and privilege of Brethren, and might be regarded in their religious character as the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind. Fully sensible of their wants they were hungry for the bread of life, they received the call by Christ with gratitude and gladness of heart, and they readily and

SERM. IX. thankfully resorted to this heavenly Feast.

But still there was room for more. Unlike the Covenant of the Law which was confined to one people, the Covenant of the Gospel is laid open to all who are disposed to enter in. As soon as this dispensation was fully prepared, God sent forth his Ministers the Apostles into the highways and hedges of the Gentiles, to proclaim his offered mercies and to urge upon them every powerful motive which could influence their choice to embrace the terms of salvation: and by the blessing of God upon their diligence many nations were called into the Church of Christ, and joyfully accepted the great and precious promises of the gospel.

Very different was the case of the Jews in general as a nation. Because they refused to come when originally called, they have incurred the displeasure of Almighty God, who has decreed thereupon that they shall not be admitted to his spiritual feast. In consequence of which they are excluded from that Covenant which was once established with their Fathers; and while they are exiles and fugitives over the

the face of the earth, they still continue with the veil upon their hearts[c]: they sojourn among Christian States obdurate and unconverted, a monument of divine wrath against the children of disobedience. SERM. XI.

THUS the parable represents this important truth in the history of our Religion, how the first offers of grace were made to the Jews, but on their default were extended to the Gentiles.—Of the great body of the Gentiles we constitute a part. In common with all those who are out of the city and pale of Israel, we have been called from the highways and hedges of of the world to embrace those terms of divine grace, which the Jews ungratefully refused. For since we live in a country that acknowledges the Faith of Christ, we are invited every day in his Word and by his Ministers to partake of the benefits which this holy Faith conveys. Now surely when we reflect upon the advantages we possess, in comparison with our Fathers in ancient times, in comparison with the Jews

[c] 2 Cor. iii. 15.

them-

SERM. IX. themselves who were once the chosen and peculiar people, we have abundant reason to rejoice in this imparted grace, and we may reasonably take up the words of the Psalmist to express our gratitude, *Our lot is cast in a fair land, and we have a goodly heritage* [f].

But while we rejoice in these imparted benefits, it behoves us to temper our joy with a serious caution, lest we also fall into the same kind of error, which exposed the chosen people to the displeasure and correction of heaven. If they are deprived of that inheritance which was given to their Fathers, excluded from that Covenant which was once peculiarly theirs, and scattered as exiles and fugitives through the world, let us take this example as a warning to ourselves, that if we be like them in committing the sin, we shall also be like them in suffering the punishment. Unless we accept this invitation of grace with better dispositions than the Jews, we also shall be rejected in common with the Jews; and the blessings of the gospel will on our default be extended to other people, who yet are

[f] Psalm xvi. 6.

strangers

strangers to the name of Christ, among the Barbarians of the world. SERM. IX.

If the original branches of the true Olive tree were broken off, because they were degenerated from their genuine stock, we must not expect that the grafts of a wild Olive tree will be preserved, should they also fail to partake of the root and nurture of the true Olive tree. In this kind of similitude does the Apostle speak to his Converts among the Gentiles now engrafted into the stock of God's promises by faith in Christ: and hence he forms this useful admonition; *Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee* [t].

In this general application of the parable we find ourselves represented in the case of those who were invited last. But in drawing a practical improvement it will not be superfluous to inquire, whether it may not also bear a closer and more particular application to different characters and descriptions of men among ourselves, corresponding to the different orders of invitation given

[t] Rom. xi. 17, &c.

in

SERM. IX. in the parable. Of men who are invited now to the profession of the gospel we may consider some as invited early, and some as invited late.

Now those we may suppose to be invited early, who through the benefits of a good education or some other favourable circumstance of station, fortune, or understanding have prior opportunities or superior means of coming at the knowledge of the truth. We should not by any means affirm, that such persons like the Pharisees and Scribes of old are more ready than those of inferior endowments to misemploy these advantages, and to make excuse for not complying with this heavenly call. But is there not room for this question to be put? Is the religion of Christ more regarded by those, who have greater ties of gratitude to God for many of his mercies, and above all for an earlier and fuller acquaintance with his holy word? It must indeed be confessed, that where there is a superior knowledge, there does not always follow a superior practice; and where there are greater claims of gratitude, there is not always a proportionate acknowledgement. Now to persons thus favoured

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in their education or circumstance of life the parable supplies this salutary caution, that as they have an earlier and superior acquaintance with the will of God, so there is a claim upon them for a prompter and a fuller service. If they are inattentive to the loud and early calls of God in his written word, they forfeit those benefits which are tendered to them, they heighten their ingratitude, and they aggravate in consequence their own condemnation. SERM. IX.

On the other hand we may consider those as invited late, who for want of education, or through some unfavourable circumstances of fortune, station, or understanding, have small and scanty means of apprehending the will of God; so that they seem to be cast out of the pale of divine grace, and abandoned to the wilderness of moral ignorance and error. Now to them the parable supplies this gracious encouragement; that rejected as they seem of the care of heaven they are still within the eye and compass of a gracious Providence, which attends to their present wants, consults their final welfare, and as it judges best, will form some means to call them to the knowledge of the truth.

And

SERM. IX. And if they attend to the call with devout and earnest minds, and gratefully comply with the terms of acceptance, the gates of heaven will not be shut against them. Notwithstanding the present indigence of their souls, they shall finally obtain a free admittance to the heavenly table.

But to wave the distinction between those invited first and those invited last, we must acknowledge it to be too general a feature of character among all classes of men, who have received this heavenly call, to be cold and indifferent in embracing it. The same worldly concerns, which obstructed the attention of the people in our Saviour's day, continue to prevail in ours. One man is engaged in the pursuit of pleasure, another in that of riches, and another in that of honour. And though our Lord continues to importune them in his Word and by his Ministers, yet the impression that is made on their hearts is too frequently transient and unproductive. They still make excuses to God and their own conscience, and turn with avidity to their secular pursuits, as if these were their serious and their sole concern. When they shew such indifference

ference to this first and sovereign good, can they presume to hope that they shall obtain the approbation of their Lord, or that they shall acquire the blessed privilege of eating bread in the Kingdom of God? SERM. IX.

To correct this indifference to the calls of grace, it is expedient that we learn to rate them according to their real excellence. That a high degree of blessedness is comprehended in them will be sensibly ascertained by every one, who compares what the world offers with what religion yields. In the world we behold a mixture of good and evil. To those, who have the good things of life, a melancholy reflexion must sometimes intrude in the midst of their enjoyments, that the time of enjoying them is limited and uncertain, and that if they be not lost by the casualties of life, or dissipated by disease or infirmity, they must inevitably fail them at the hour of death. To those on the other hand, who have the evil things of life, there is an unhappy prospect of increasing sorrows with increasing years. And though their days are evil, though they possess months of vanity and wearisome nights are appointed unto them,

SERM. IX. them[h], yet they solicitously cling to life, and shrink from the grave, even though they account it a refuge from every mortal trouble. In this gloomy view of things the considerate mind may be disposed to ask, *Who will shew us any good?* In the sorrows and the wants of life it is not to be found; nor even in the pleasures and possessions of life can we find any durable or substantial good. This good is only to be found in the walks of religion, which administers peace on earth by displaying to us the prospect of happiness in heaven.

But carnal and worldly minds have very different views of religion. They shrink from the invitation which it offers, because, as they vainly would persuade themselves, it demands too great a sacrifice of present and of worldly good. This however is a mistake, which originates only from a want of experience. If once they had been habituated to the exercises of religious Wisdom, they would have found to their inexhaustible comfort, that her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her

[h] Job vii, 3.

paths

paths are peace[1]. When once we become acquainted with religion, not in speculation, but by experiment, we shall be brought to acknowledge in its favour, that in the ordinary course of things it does not debar us from the enjoyment of any real good, and that it does not require of us any great or extraordinary sacrifice. As a man of economy in his temporal concerns might accept an invitation to a feast without any prejudice to his worldly business or interest, so a man of true wisdom in the necessary task of religion may accept the invitation of his heavenly Lord without relinquishing any portion that is worth a care, of those pleasures or riches or honours, which are so desirable in the estimation of the world. Religion certainly spares no argument or motive to discountenance an inordinate affection for the things of this world, because of its tendency to detach us from the pursuit of a more essential good. Yet would we consult our real happiness, we should find that Religion, while it principally looks to our eternal welfare, is also conducive

SERM. IX.

[1] Prov. iii. 17.

SERM. IX. to our temporal comfort, and contributes rather to enlarge than to diminish every worldly possession. While it forbids what is unlawful, and restrains what is intemperate or excessive, it enhances our enjoyment of every worldly pleasure: while it teaches us to be upright and diligent and industrious in our several callings, it promotes our attainment of worldly wealth; or it supplies what is better than wealth, the virtue of being contented with a little: and while it requires us to let our light shine before men, and to provide things honest in the sight of all men, it procures us that reputation, which in the esteem of all the excellent of the earth is accounted the highest pinnacle of human honour. Thus godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and also of that which is to come [k].

But since a competition of service must sometimes occur between the things of this and of another life, it is certainly the dictate of true wisdom, that we relinquish the less to attain the greater good, that we express our re-

[k] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

gard to this invitation of our Lord by giving it a preference to every worldly pursuit, and that we readily forego every temporal possession or gratification, which contributes in any degree to hinder our acceptance among the Guests of Heaven. SERM. IX.

To conclude: from this parable let us severally take a caution to ourselves, that we readily comply with this divine invitation, as soon as ever we receive it. To him, who is called among the first, who by means of a good education is made acquainted with the gospel promises in the morning of his days, be it a chief concern to cultivate them faithfully for the remainder of his life. As he has more abundant cause of gratitude to God for an early communication of divine light and truth, so it is the more incumbent on him to improve them with all diligence and application. To him, who has been called among the last, who through the defect or default of education has failed of attaining this first and most necessary knowledge in the most convenient hour of youth, be it also a chief concern to improve this knowledge and to grow in grace, as

SERM. IX. soon as he has means and opportunities. As the time is become contracted for so important a work, let him be the more earnest immediately to set about it, and to repair the days, which have been already lost in ignorance or in error, by a strict application for the rest of his life to this chief and most essential good.

Be it the assiduous endeavour of us all, whether invited early or invited late, to relinquish every pleasure, every business, every honour, that comes in competition with this heavenly call. In all the engagements of this mortal life be it our first and last concern to comply without reluctance or delay with these precious overtures of Heaven. While we suffer the things of this world to engage a portion of our care, let us always be upon our guard that they do not engross too great a share of our affections. Let us never lose sight of this encouraging admonition of our blessed Lord, *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you*[1]. In the present life we shall

[1] Matt. vi. 33.

have

have the testimony of our conscience which is a continual feast; and in the future life we shall have the inestimable privilege of sitting down with the Patriarchs and Apostles, and eating the bread of life in the Kingdom of God. SERM. IX.

SERMON X.

THE TWO SONS, WHO HAD RECEIVED THEIR PORTIONS.

LUKE XV. 11, 12.

And he said, A certain Man had two Sons. And the Younger of them, said to his Father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

SERM. X.

IT was the general character of our Lord in his ministry that he went about doing good. But in no kind of benevolence did he take a greater delight, than in conferring spiritual health on all who were sensible of their sickness. While he frequently relieved the infirmities of the body, it was his constant and invariable aim to heal the maladies of the soul. He took all op-

SERM. X. portunities to instruct the ignorant, to reclaim the wandering, and to cheer the penitent. Hence to persons of this description his company was always welcome, his conversation always desirable. Accordingly we read in the opening of this discourse, *Then drew near unto him all the Publicans and Sinners for to hear him.* Yet though all his faculties were devoted to the service of mankind, he could not give satisfaction to all. *The Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth Sinners, and eateth with them.*

In this brief report of the Evangelist we discover not only the general character of these two different orders of people, but also the particular dispositions with which they approached our Lord. The one, not unconscious of their spiritual defects, resorted to him for instruction to their ignorance, for correction to their errors, for consolation in their sorrows of repentance. The other, trusting in themselves that they were righteous, came not to derive any knowledge to their understandings or any improvement to their hearts. Their design in attending was to have a malignant watch on his conversation

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and demeanour. Nor could they have shewn a greater disposition to censure, than to murmur at a conduct, which had for its object the spiritual health of those who stood in need of his assistance. SERM. X.

To these uncharitable murmurs our Lord replies in parables; *What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he hath found it he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he cometh home he calleth together his Friends and Neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.*

This image, so familiar to the common orders of mankind, was rendered sacred to the Jews from its frequent recurrence in the Psalms and the Prophets, wherein the Creator and Governor of the world is described under the similitude of a good and tender Shepherd assiduously attentive to the welfare of his flock. In this pleasing image our Lord also represents him diligently seeking to reclaim the Sinner from the error of his ways, rejoicing to restore him to the fold of the faithful, and inviting

SERM. X. viting all the heavenly host to unite with him in joy on the conversion of a Sinner; a joy, in which they readily participate; for as our Saviour adds, *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one Sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.*

This passage on the first recital appears to have difficulties, which require some comment or explanation. For it seems to countenance a doctrine not in harmony with the tenour of the gospel, that there are just persons who need no repentance: it seems also to favour a position which our reason cannot easily comprehend, that one repenting sinner is of greater estimation in the sight of heaven than a whole company of those that are strictly righteous.

The common answer to these difficulties is as follows.

These words must not be taken to imply, that any men are competent in their present state of frailty to attain such perfection in righteousness as literally to need no repentance. For it is no uncommon mode of speech in holy scripture to express absolutely what is to be understood comparatively. There

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is none strictly righteous: there is none that positively needeth no repentance. Yet compared with the wicked a man is called righteous, who makes it his constant endeavour to comply with the whole will of God: compared with the sinner that repenteth a man may be said to need no repentance, who has lived in an habitual service of the Lord, and therefore does not stand in need of so total and radical a change of heart and life, as an inveterate and habitual sinner must indispensably undergo. SERM. X.

Neither should these words be taken to imply, that one repenting Sinner is of more account in heaven than many just or righteous men. For that is more than even the letter of the parable supports. Though the Shepherd is more gratified at the moment in finding the sheep that was lost, than in retaining all his flock beside, yet we do not understand that he puts a higher value on the one sheep that he has found than on the ninety and nine that never went astray. Thus also though the Inhabitants of heaven may entertain a greater joy for the time in the recovery of one Sinner than in the persevering service of many righteous men, yet we are

SERM. X. are not therefore to conclude that they put a greater value upon one Sinner that repenteth than on ninety and nine just persons who comparatively need no repentance.

Such is the common way of understanding that declaration of our Lord, that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance.—I would not unnecessarily deviate from received expositions of the holy scriptures. Yet I cannot forbear to advance a very different acceptation of these words, which has this in its favour, that it comes more directly to the purpose of the present argument, and that it bears a closer reference to the characters of those with whom he was now conversing. The aim of his present conversation was not only to encourage the Publicans and Sinners to repentance, but also to reprove the Pharisees and Scribes for their presumptuous opinion of themselves and their want of charity to others. Thus as by the Sinner that repenteth he evidently alludes to that description of men, who then drew near for to hear him; so by the just persons which

which need no repentance he may also be understood to allude to that other description of men, who murmured at his conduct in receiving sinners and eating with them. Now the passage thus understood conveys in the gentlest language the severest reproof: for it implies that the blessed Angels entertain a greater satisfaction at the conversion of one sinner like the Publicans, who is conscious of his unworthiness and anxious to correct himself, than in the self-imputed righteousness of a multitude of men like the Pharisees and Scribes, who presume themselves to be so perfect as literally to need no repentance. And this acceptation is agreeable to our Saviour's frequent mode of speech; such as that which he used on a similar occasion, when the Pharisees murmured at his sitting down with Publicans and Sinners; *They that are whole need not a Physician, but they that are sick: I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance* [a].

SERM. X.

The same sentiment he repeats under another similitude from domestic life: *Either what Woman having ten pieces of*

[a] Matt. ix. 12, 13.

silver,

SERM. X.

silver, if she lose one piece doth not light a candle and sweep the house and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it she calleth her Friends and her Neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

By these two easy and familiar parables our Lord, in answer to the cavils of the Pharisees and Scribes, fully justifies his conduct in receiving sinners and eating with them, since it gave him opportunities to promote and encourage their repentance; a change of that high account in heaven, as even to enhance the joy that subsists in that seat of happiness.

Yet willing to place this doctrine in a still more engaging and impressive point of view, he proceeds to represent it in a third Parable deduced from the common relations of human life.

A certain Man had two Sons. The character of the younger Son is very soon disclosed in what he says to his Father, *Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to my share.* Indulgent to his wish *he divided unto them his living,*

or

or he allotted them portions for their respective maintenance. SERM. X.

If the motive of the younger Son for making this request had been to put himself in some honest and ingenuous employment; his enterprize or industry might deserve some applause. But his object in seeking an early independence was, that he might indulge the devices of his own heart without correction or control. The same impatience which he had shewn to take his fortune into his own hands he continues to manifest in assuming the direction of his own conduct. Anxious to see the world, and entertaining a secret thought, that he could more freely indulge his pleasures at a distance from his Father's observation, he did not suffer many days to pass, before *he gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country.*

While the parable only touches on the outlines of his character and fortune, we may supply to our imagination many probable circumstances as full of instruction as they are full of interest. He would not be dismissed from the embrace of an affectionate Parent without many good admonitions for

SERM. X. for the guidance of his life on his entrance into the world. But in the variety of seducing objects, that now rose before him, the voice of wisdom lost its influence, and his good resolutions gradually gave way. Without a present monitor to direct him in the choice of his company, he fell among the Sons and Daughters of dissipation, who looked on pleasure as the sovereign good, who invited one another to enjoy the good things that are present, and speedily to use the creatures in their youth. In such alluring company the voice of his parental Monitor was forgotten, his moral sense of right and wrong was perverted, his good resolutions were overthrown, and the seductions of vice being supported by the ridicule of what was good and laudable, he surrendered himself to dissolute excesses, *and wasted his substance in riotous living.*

Brought up as he had been in a sense of what was right and fit, he could not easily discard those honest principles, which he had imbibed in his early years. Accustomed in his Father's house to consider sin as the basest disease of the soul, he could not soon be reconciled to

to her when presented in a more allur- SERM.
ing guize. And though reflexion might X.
be suppressed in the height of his revel-
ries, yet conscience would not fail to haunt him in his more sober hours, to expose his vices in their proper colours, and to warn him of their miserable fruits. Yet notwithstanding the remonstrance of the friendly monitor within him, he is entangled in the maze of error, and against conviction perseveres in sin, till he sensibly experiences the fatal consequence of her ways. *When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.*

His portion being now exhausted by extravagance, and his constitution being impaired by vicious indulgence, he found that he had made a miserable choice. That voice of conscience, which he had laboured to overpower in the height of his intemperance, cannot now be suppressed, when he is come to himself. That paradise of folly, that enchanted him so long, is all at once converted into a wilderness of woe. By this sudden change he discovers to his shame how slight is the bond of friendship among the vicious. His

SERM. X. Companions and Harlots, who had partaken in his abundance, acknowledge him no more, when he is reduced to want. Want is an unwelcome visitor to all: but to one, who has prodigally fared in all the luxuries of life, it comes with accumulated misery. The patient and hardy Son of poverty is prepared by labour or by service to encounter or to endure it. But how shall the voluptuous Reveller be able to support it? *He cannot dig, to beg he is ashamed* [b]. To relieve his hunger he is compelled to submit to the most menial servitude. *He went and joined himself to a Citizen of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine.* Yet this degrading task supplied him hardly with the necessaries of life: *For he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him.*

So mysterious are the ways and so merciful the dispensations of Providence, that out of the greatest evils are often to be deduced the greatest benefits. When the miseries of the Prodigal became very great, they brought him to a knowledge of himself. While em-

[b] Luke xvi. 3.

ployed

ployed in this menial task, so unworthy of his capacities and so degrading to his birth, he cannot but contrast the wretchedness of his present lot with the peace and plenty of that house, in which in the day of his innocence he had maintained the relation and experienced the tender treatment of a Son. *How many hired servants of my Father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!* SERM. X.

This reflexion leads him to sigh for a restoration to his dear and favoured home. But what hope can he indulge, that he may on any terms be admitted into the household of that Parent, whose name he has disgraced, whose precepts he has set at nought, whose good example he has defied, and whose last indulgence he has so extravagantly abused? Or should his Parent be disposed to clemency, with a sense of his demerits what confidence can he have to come into his presence, and to look him in the face? But when he calls to remembrance all those tokens of affection which he once experienced under the parental roof, he determines to repair to his Father's house, to acknowledge his unworthiness, and to commit

SERM. X. himself to his mercy; *I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son. Make me as one of thy hired servants.*

A Parent's heart is naturally disposed to pardon errors, wherever there appears a disposition to repentance. But the clemency of this Parent far surpasses the hopes of his unworthy but penitent Son. *While he was yet a great way off, his Father saw him, and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.* As soon as the Son could give expression to the sentiments of a contrite heart, he said, as he had thought before, *Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son:*—He was proceeding in the language of humility to solicit a place among his hired servants. But the Father interrupts his penitential prayer by directing his servants to attire and to treat him as a Son; *Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this my Son was dead and is alive again, was*

was lost and is found. This gracious command was immediately obeyed. The Wanderer was apparelled as a Son; the Friends were assembled to a Feast, and the house was enlivened with the sounds of music and dancing. SERM. X.

This kind reception which a Father gave was neither followed nor approved by all his family. *Now his Elder Son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy Brother is come; and thy Father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.* On hearing this account his jealousy was found superior to his affection. Instead of meeting his Brother with a Brother's love, *he was angry, and would not come in.* Hereupon *the Father came out* of the house to conciliate and *intreat him.* But his intreaties were answered with the language of remonstrance and complaint; *Lo these many years do I serve thee, neither have I at any time transgressed thy commandment. And yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my Friends. But as soon as this thy Son was come, who*

SERM. X. *hath devoured thy living with Harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.*

The Father's answer was calculated equally to remove his jealousy and to awaken his affection. It assured him that he entertained a full sense of his faithful and dutiful demeanour, and that all his possessions were at his disposal. Nor should the return of a Brother operate at all to his disadvantage either in the feelings of a Father's heart or the disposition of his patrimony. Yet surely it was reasonable as well as natural to give some expression to parental tenderness on the restoration of a Son recovered as it were from the tomb; *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy Brother was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.*

Such is the conduct of this beautiful parable, which I have thus attempted to amplify and illustrate, though not without a hazard I must confess of infringing that simplicity, which gives it so great an interest with every class of men.

SERM. X.

WHILE we look no farther than to its literal sense, it engages our regard as a truly affecting picture of human life, and we are prepared to accept it as an instructive lesson of human conduct. To those who are beginning life, to him especially, who is raised above a state of indigence, and is gifted with talents and capacities to become a good and useful member of society, it supplies a caution against a life of dissipation and intemperate and unlawful pleasure, by shewing the unhappy consequence of such a choice, in the loss of fortune, health, reputation, Friends, the regard and favour both of God and man. If in spite of every friendly warning he should still persevere in the fatal path, till the consequence of his follies is come upon him, it proceeds to suggest the most salutary counsel to retrieve him from ruin, that he immediately renounce his evil ways, and labour by an altered life to conciliate pardon for his errors of all whom he has offended.

And while it yields a lesson more expressly to the Prodigal, it also suggests a conciliating behaviour to his Friends and Kindred, as soon as he gives sufficient

SERM. X. ficient tokens of an altered life, that they receive him with tenderness, commiserate his sorrows, relieve his necessities, and by a continuance of good offices encourage him to persevere in a better course.

THUS the parable supplies a most instructive moral, while we look no farther than to the literal sense.—But in order to comprehend it in its full and true design, we must explore that figurative sense, which our Saviour meant it to convey. For which purpose our attention must revert to the occasion on which it was spoken and the audience to whom it was addressed. It appears from the circumstance and tenour of the foregoing conversation, that in the characters of the two Sons an allusion is designed to those two Classes of men who then composed his audience, the Publicans and Sinners, and the Pharisees and Scribes. The Former of these like the Younger Son had lived in a state of irreligion at least, if they had not been more positively culpable; but on the preaching of Christ were led to entertain religious thoughts and penitent affections,

affections. The Latter like the Elder Son presumed on their self-imputed merits to have an exclusive title to the favour and reward of heaven, and uncharitably took offence at our gracious Lord for extending the promises of divine mercy to those, who in their harsh opinions had forfeited all title to the grace and indulgence of God. SERM. X.

And here it deserves our particular regard, that the Jews exactly stood in the same relation to the Gentiles, as the Pharisees and Scribes to the Publicans and Sinners. Hence also the parable will bear an equal reference to these two more comprehensive Descriptions of mankind. And therefore in opening the figurative design, I shall consider these two parallel applications in concurrence. While I keep in my view the primary reference to the Pharisees and Scribes and the Publicans and Sinners, I shall pay a more express regard to that extensive application, which it bears at the same time, to the Jewish nation and the Gentile world.

Now the Father who had two Sons is an image of God, the Creator and Disposer of the great household of the world, the common Parent both of the Jews

SERM. X. Jews and the Gentiles; on both of whom he has conferred many benefits in the dispensations of his providence. The Jews like the Elder Son continued under his more immediate eye: they remained in his household, they acknowledged his government, they had respect unto his law. Very different from theirs was the case of the Gentiles. Like the Younger Son at an early period of time they had withdrawn themselves from the service of their heavenly Father. Not liking to retain God in their knowledge they had become addicted to all manner of idolatrous and immoral practices, and had perverted the blessings of Providence to the service of their lawless and unwarrantable passions.

But as the Publicans and Sinners at the preaching of Christ, so also the Gentiles at the preaching of his Apostles, were brought to a sense of their miserable state; and being convinced of the danger of living without God in the world, they forsook the worship of idols, they renounced the service of their evil affections, they turned to God in penitence and prayer, they took up resolutions of conforming in their

their practice to the faith of Christ; in consequence of which by the grace of God and through the merits of a Saviour they obtained the remission of their sins, were received into the household of his Church, were admitted to the name of Children, and were invested with the noblest privileges of the Christian covenant. SERM. X.

This indulgence to persons, who had long been considered out of the pale of God's promises, was however not agreeable to the Jews; and of them more especially to the Pharisees and Scribes; who, presuming on their merits in a strict and literal observance of the Mosaic law, assumed to themselves an exclusive title to the divine approbation and reward. When therefore they saw the partition wall broken down, and the Covenant of grace extended to those whom they reputed aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, they were angry and would not come in; while to all the parental intreaties of God by Jesus Christ and his Apostles the answer of their hearts was this, "Have "we not continually served thee all "our days, and punctually complied "with all thy commandments? And "shall

SERM. X. "shall those benefits of divine grace, "which have hitherto been confined "to the faithful Seed of Abraham, the "peculiar Heirs of promise, be now "extended even in more abundant "measure to Publicans and to Hea-"thens, who are strangers to thy law, "and by their idolatrous and irreligious "lives have shewn themselves unwor-"thy of all sacred knowledge, all divine "indulgence?"

In reply to this ungracious remonstrance God is here represented as expostulating with them for their unreasonable umbrage: "Admitting what you "presume, that you have continually "served God all your days, and never "at any time transgressed his com-"mandment, yet why should you mur-"mur at his benevolent decree to ex-"tend the benefits of the New Cove-"nant to all other nations of the earth? "Though under the new dispensation "of the Gospel greater mercies are "shewn, and more precious promises "are given, than under the Law of "Moses, yet on condition of comply-"ing faithfully with the will of God "you are still regarded in the light of an "Elder Son, who has a prior and supe-

"rior

"rior portion in his Father's inheri- SERM.
"tance; for to you before all other X.
"nations are proposed the gracious
"terms of the gospel covenant. But
"the blessings now imparted unto the
"world are of too valuable a kind to
"be circumscribed within the limits of
"any order or of any nation. Do not
"therefore indulge these uncharitable
"murmurs against the gracious decrees
"of God in admitting others out of
"your own community to participate
"with you as Brethren in these ines-
"timable benefits; but rather rejoice
"with the Inhabitants of heaven on
"the grace thus accorded to a sinful
"world. For what is more worthy of
"the joy and gratulation of the hea-
"venly Host than the recovery of sin-
"ners from the death of sin unto the
"life of righteousness, from the sen-
"tence of eternal wrath to the glorious
"hope of pardon, peace, and hap-
"piness?"

Thus the parable appears designed to have borne a special reference as well to those two Classes of men, to whom our Saviour spoke, as to those two great Divisions of mankind, that sub-

SERM. X. subsisted at the time when he came into the world.

But in order to draw a lesson from it of more immediate application to Christians of the present day, it may be an useful argument of discourse to dwell more at large on the behaviour of the Younger Son, as it represents the conduct of a Sinner under the light of the Gospel.

In the morning of his days, when the power of reason begins to operate in his understanding, he finds himself endowed by the bounty of God with talents and capacities for living in his favour and obtaining his inheritance. But unhappily for his future peace he misapplies them to a very different use. That he may not be interrupted in the pursuit of his own imaginations, he endeavours to withdraw himself from his heavenly Father's eye: and though he cannot but be conscious if he thinks at all, that the eye of God is in every place beholding the evil and the good, yet he contrives to put him out of his thoughts by neglecting his service, and shutting his ear against his word. Thus having rejected the influence of God's parental grace,

grace, having stifled the voice of the monitor within him, he fatally wanders into evil ways, he gives himself up to a reprobate mind, and miserably wastes the endowments of heaven in the gratification of his corrupt and vicious appetites. In this unworthy course he perseveres till he is reduced to a most deplorable state of spiritual want, and at length surrenders himself to a most debasing servitude to all his inordinate affections. SERM. X.

In this unhappy state we may suppose him to be judicially visited by some severe disease, affliction, or calamity. But in the midst of judgement God remembers mercy. By the wise destination of an all-controlling Providence the just corrections of his sins are rendered the gracious calls to repentance. He now becomes awakened to a sense of his miserable condition. His conscience sets the catalogue of his sins in terrible array before him. And now that he reflects on his unhappy degeneracy from God and goodness, he looks back with regret and self reproach on that season of his former life, when he was in a state of comparative innocence, a Child of grace, an

SERM. X. Heir of heavenly promise; he heavily laments his long abuse of intellectual talents and a religious education, and the consequent loss of the divine favour and acceptance: and while his soul is perishing for want of the necessaries of the spiritual life, he regards with envy the poorest and most illiterate of the Christian household, who pass their days in the service of God, and are abundantly supplied with the bread of heaven.

While these reflexions pass within his breast, he passionately sighs for a return to the family and household of God. But when he contrasts his own unworthiness with those demands of holiness which God has unalterably made, when he reads those passages of holy scripture which affirm, that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity[c], that without holiness no man shall see the Lord[d], that the sinner shall not stand in the judgement, and that the way of the ungodly shall perish[e]; he becomes overwhelmed with doubts, that he has transgressed beyond

[c] Hab. i. 13. [d] Heb. xii. 14.
[e] Psalm i. 5, 6.

the reach of mercy, and that he can find no place for repentance, though he seek it carefully with tears[f]. SERM. X.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart God will not despise[g]. While he is thus heavily mourning under the pangs of a wounded conscience, a ray of consolation, sent from the cheering Source of light and truth, illuminates his soul. From the judgements of God denounced on the unrepenting sinner, his reflexion is guided to those endearing characters of mercy which the gospel offers to the penitent; especially in those passages where God is described as an affectionate Father, who corrects that he may amend, who smites that he may heal, who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance[h]. Thus raised from despondence by the favour of heaven, he resolves to present himself in penitence before the throne of heavenly grace, to confess and deplore his errors, to acknowledge his unworthiness, and to supplicate leave to serve in the humblest

[f] Heb. xii. 17. [g] Psalm li. 17.
[h] 2 Pet. iii. 9.

SERM. X. capacity, that so he may be admitted to partake of the bread of life even among the least in the Kingdom of God.

When he is thus resolved upon returning into the way of righteousness, his heavenly Father looks with complacence on this happy change, he comes forth to meet him with his holy Spirit, he co-operates with his grace to forward his salvation, he has compassion on his sorrows, he accepts his tears, he greets his return to virtue with forgiveness and affection: in the language of parable he divests him of the sordid rags of sin, he puts upon him the robe of righteousness, he girds him with truth, and he puts upon his feet the preparation of the gospel of peace[i]. He calls upon the heavenly host to celebrate his return with songs of joy and praise. And highly does this call agree with the benevolence of their happy natures. Thus the word of God represents them as always taking a very tender and active interest in the spiritual welfare of their fellow servants upon earth. For hath he not given them a

[i] Eph. vi. 14, &c.

charge

charge over those who trust in him, to keep them in all their ways[k]? And are they not ministering Spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation[l]? And as they are disposed to lament over the lapse of a Sinner, and employ every aid consistent with a state of discipline to turn his heart unto the Lord, so they rejoice in the presence of God on his conversion to the way of peace, and are prepared both in heart and voice to congratulate his arrival, whenever God shall call him to the same habitations of eternal joy. SERM. X.

In this affecting parable we see both the miserable effects of sin and the blessed fruits of repentance. To the Sinner that goeth on still in his wickedness, whatever be the pleasures that he may find or may imagine in this evil way, there is nothing in the end in store, but anguish and remorse, the impending wrath of God in this life, his certain vengeance in the life to come. When such a gloomy prospect is before him, how highly does it behove him, while there is time and place for repentance, to abandon all his evil

[k] Psalm xci. 11. [l] Heb. i. 14.

SERM. X. courses, and in confession and penitence to turn unto the Lord!

To engage him in this necessary change the Gospel yields every gracious encouragement. Though to the man who perseveres in sin God may appear in the light of a Master, who strictly and rigidly exacts of all their several tasks, and denounces and determines wrath on those who fail in their appointed service; yet to the truly contrite and repenting Sinner he presents himself in the tender and endearing character of a Father, willing and ready to accept his tears, to receive him again into his household, and to restore him to the name and privilege of a Son.

When so much grace is accorded to a Sinner on condition of repentance, it highly behoves him not to abuse this grace, either by putting off this necessary work from time to time, or by contenting himself with a partial or a slight repentance. In order that his repentance may be available to salvation, it must be sincere and fervent; he must review all his former life, he must examine his heart, he must confess, deplore, abandon all his sins, and devote himself altogether to God and goodness.

It

It must be universal, extending to all kinds of sin without exception or reservation: he must forsake all his evil ways, be they ever so dear, familiar, or habitual; he must put himself upon a continual guard against all those sins, which whether from constitution or habit or circumstance of life do most readily beset him: and as he determines to abandon every sort of error, so also must he learn to practise every branch of righteousness. It must be immediate; for so alone can he shew himself sincere in his return to God: if he is truly solicitous to make his peace with God, he will not defer to the morrow what he can set about today; he will not suffer the sun to go down without a resolution to amend his life, since he cannot assure himself but this night his soul may be required of him. A repentance of this nature, sincere, universal, and immediate, it is to be hoped will be available to his final peace. And when he has heavily mourned for his sins and turned unto the Lord with all his heart, he may have confidence towards God through the merits of a Saviour, that he will be accepted in his Father's house with

SERM. X.

SERM. X. such gratulation of the heavenly host, as of one who was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.

Thus the case of the Younger Son supplies the Sinner with this double instruction, a warning in the course of his sins, and an encouragement in his resolutions of repentance.

But I must not leave the subject without attempting to deduce another lesson from the case of the Elder Son: for though this portion of the parable may seem to have an exclusive reference to the Jews in opposition to the Gentiles, and to the Pharisees and Scribes in contradistinction to the Publicans and Sinners; yet this also may be found to admit of application to the Christian world, as a caution to those men, who study both to know and to do the will of God, that they do not entertain either presumptuous opinions of themselves or uncharitable sentiments of others. After those repeated lessons, which our Lord has laboured to inculcate both by precept and example, in behalf of humility and charity, the two more distinguishing ornaments of his religion, what Believer in

in the Gospel can arrogate a title from his own deserts to the peculiar favour of Heaven, or can murmur at the mercies extended to a contrite and repenting Sinner? Yet still it may be of use to combat that disposition of human nature, which will sometimes prevail in defiance of our Saviour's precepts, to rate ourselves too high and other men too low in the scale of Christian virtue and in the estimation of Heaven. SERM. X.

But what is the merit, on which we presume that we are more righteous than our Brethren, and more in favour with God? Is it a more zealous profession of faith? He whom we profess to believe hath said, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven*[m]. Is it a superior knowledge in the word of God? He who declared this word hath said, *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*[n]. Is it a more animated love of Christ? The object of this love hath said, *If ye love me, keep my commandments*[o].

[m] Mat. vii. 21. [n] John xiij. 17. [o] John xiv. 15.

SERM. X. As a tree is known by its fruits, so our faith, our knowledge, and our love are shewn by a conformity of heart and character and life to him, whom we profess to believe, and to know, and to love. And we give the most unquestionable evidence of being truly his Disciples, when we copy him in those virtues, on which he laid the greatest stress, and which are the striking features both of his doctrine and his example, namely in humility and charity; when we learn of him to be meek and lowly in heart [p], and when we love one another as he hath loved us [q].

On the other hand do we presume on our obedience? Let us always bear in mind, that of ourselves we are indigent and helpless creatures, always liable to err, and perpetually falling into error. Without the grace of God we can do nothing; and even when we have done what is our duty to do, we are but unprofitable servants. And therefore we should never dare to say to God in language like to that of the Elder Son in his remonstrance to a

[p] Matt. xi. 29. [q] John xv. 12.

Father,

Father, *Lo these many years do I serve thee, neither have I at any time transgressed thy commandment*; for with all our endeavours we can never attain the true Christian character, neither can we ever say, we are already perfect. With all our vigilance we must have committed many sins, with all our diligence we must have omitted many duties: we all stand in need of a Saviour's merits, as well to obtain remission of our sins as to procure acceptance to our imperfect obedience. And therefore it behoves us to humble ourselves before God, and to supplicate his favour, not for our merits but of his mercies through the mediation of our blessed Lord. SERM. X.

While we thus endeavour to correct all vain opinions of ourselves, we shall be brought to entertain more charitable sentiments and dispositions toward others. If they shew forth a religious conversation and deportment, so as to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things[r], let us give God the praise, let us rejoice in the blessing they derive upon themselves, and the blessed ex-

[r] Tit. ii. 10.

ample

SERM. X. ample they supply to the world. But if on the other hand they are manifestly wandering into the fatal paths of sin, instead of despising them like the Pharisees and Scribes, and standing aloof from the office of administering counsel and assistance, let us follow the example of our blessed Lord in his dealings to Publicans and Sinners; in true charity to their souls let us use all means and opportunities to convince them of their danger, to retrieve them from an evil course, and to restore them to the better way. So shall we concur with Angels now in promoting their return to their heavenly Father's house. And so shall we rejoice with Angels hereafter on their final acceptance into the great household of God.

SERMON

SERMON XI.

THE STEWARD OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

LUKE XVI. 8, 9.

And the Lord commended the unjust Steward, because he had done wisely: for the Children of this World are wiser in their generation than the Children of Light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

IT is one principal branch of wisdom to understand the best application of worldly wealth. This wisdom the men of this world profess to know to perfection. But their knowledge in the most essential point is of little use, as it is limited altogether to this life. The best and only certain Guide, to whom we can resort for instruction in this par-

SERM. XI. particular, is our holy Teacher Jesus Christ: and this he has imparted in the following parable.

There was a certain Rich Man who had a Steward: and the same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods. Justly offended at his unfaithful dealing *he called him and said unto him, What is this that I hear of thee? Give an account of thy Stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer Steward.* Conscious of the justice of this accusation and alarmed at the consequence, the Steward began to meditate within himself what means he should use to provide for a day of want: *What shall I now do, when my Lord taketh away from me the Stewardship? I cannot dig: to beg I am ashamed.*

Not readily discovering any honest means of subsistence, he had recourse to measures of another kind: *I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of my stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his Lord's Debtors unto him, and he said unto the first, How much owest thou to my Lord? And he said, A hundred measures of oil: and he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then said he to another,*

And

And how much owest thou? And he said, SERM. *A hundred measures of wheat: and he said* XI. *unto him, Take thy bill, and write four-score.* Thus by striking off a large portion from their several debts he sought to conciliate their friendship: and having shewn himself attentive to their interest, while he had the means of serving them, he looked to them for sustenance, when his stewardship should be taken from him.

His scheme was politic, though highly fraudulent. If in wasting his Lord's goods he merited dismission from his office, this closing act of his stewardship deserved a severer reprehension. Yet we read in the sequel, *The Lord commended the unjust Steward, because he had done wisely.* We may here be disposed to ask, how he should commend an act as wise, which was dishonest in its principle, and even injurious to himself. Now we are not here to suppose, that he approved the conduct of the Steward, or accounted it wise in a moral view. It is simply to be understood, that he admired his craft or worldly wisdom in taking such a measure to provide himself a home for the time when he should be in need. And this

SERM. XI. this acceptation is countenanced by the sentiment which our Saviour adds, *For the Children of this World are wiser in their generation than the Children of Light.* The Children of this world are they, who set their hearts and affections on this world: and the Children of light are they, who walk according to the light, and seek an inheritance among the Saints in light. Thus the phrase implies that men of worldly minds are wiser toward the concerns of the world, than are men of heavenly minds to the concerns of heaven. Now though the Children of this world are far from being a pattern to imitate in the choice they make, yet in the zeal with which they pursue their choice they may yield an example to the Children of light. Thus though the dealings of the Steward were flagrantly dishonest, yet his policy in providing for a future day suggests a lesson of true wisdom even to men of heavenly minds in providing for the life to come. Agreeable to which is the application which our Saviour adds, *I say unto you, Make to yourselves Friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*

It

SERM. XI.

It is here to be noted that Mammon in the figurative language of the Jews was the Genius or Demon of worldly wealth. Hence in the gospel it stands either for riches in themselves, or an inordinate love of riches in the hearts of men. Now riches in this place are stiled the Mammon of unrighteousness, either because they are too often procured by unrighteous means and applied to an unrighteous use, or rather, what is the intention in this place, because they are both precarious in their tenure and deceitful in their promises of good. Thus in the following text the unrighteous Mammon is opposed to the true riches; that is, the precarious and deceitful riches of this world are opposed to the certain and never failing riches of the world to come[a].

Thus

[a] It may be proper to notice in this place that the term (Οικονομον της αδικιας) which our Translation renders, *the Unjust Steward*, is rendered in this discourse, *the Steward of Unrighteousness;* not merely because it is more agreeable to the Letter of the Original, but because in reality it expresses another sense. Though the Steward was evidently unjust, yet it is not so much his injustice, as his worldly policy, which is proposed for our consideration. The character here given is not intended for the Steward, but for the property committed to his Stewardship; which is

SERM. XI. Thus from an instance of worldly policy, though dishonest in itself, our Saviour draws a truly valuable lesson of religious wisdom. A Steward wise to the present generation is proposed for a pattern to us to be wise for the generation that is to come. As he applied the wealth committed to his trust to conciliate friends on earth, who on his failure in his temporal charge might receive him into their houses and supply him with a maintenance for this transitory life; so the Disciples of Christ are instructed to apply the Talents, which God hath imparted to them for a time, to conciliate a Friend in heaven, who when they fail in their temporal inheritance, and are removed by death out of the tabernacle of the body, may supply them with an enduring substance, may receive them into a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.

In pursuance of the same argument our Lord proceeds to say: *He, that is*

is agreeable to the Phrase that occurs in the following text (Μαμμωνα της αδικιας). As the Mammon of Unrighteousness means precarious and deceitful wealth, so the Steward of Unrighteousness is the Steward of precarious and deceitful wealth.

faithful

faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; and he, that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much. He, who is faithful to his Lord in the inferior trust of worldly goods, gives an earnest therein, that he will be also faithful in the superior trust of spiritual goods: and he, that is unfaithful in a worldly trust, therein gives a token, that he will be unfaithful also in a spiritual trust. SERM. XI.

If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous Mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? If you are unfaithful in the charge of those precarious and transitory riches which belong to this life, can you hope that God will commit to your charge the substantial and durable riches of the life to come?

And if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? And if you are not faithful in the use of those transitory riches, which God has not given you, but only lent you for a season, how can you expect, that he will impart to your use those unalienable riches, which are given to the faithful on a certain and irrevocable tenure?

SERM. XI. In all this discourse our Lord recommends an application of worldly wealth to the improvement of our eternal interest. Thus also he directs his Hearers, whenever there is a competition of interest between temporal and spiritual concerns, to pay the first regard to the most important claims. *No man can serve two Masters;* that is, two Masters of opposite dispositions and characters: *For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.* Men cannot give a close and intent application at the same time to the service of God and the service of the world. If they are too intent on the cares of the world, the service of God will most probably be forgotten: and therefore it is incumbent on them to give their first and chief concern to God.

The Gospel in this place reports, that *the Pharisees who were covetous heard all these things.* And by recording this feature of their character on the present occasion it implies a design in our Lord to reprehend their inordinate love of worldly goods. In this respect they were the Children of this world, not-

withstanding their pretensions to a nobler parentage; and they shewed in their conduct, that they were wiser in their generation than the Children of light. But though he meant to inculcate a wisdom of a purer kind, they despised his instructions, and *derided him.* SERM. XI.

SUCH appears to be the special and immediate aim of our Lord's instructions to his Hearers in the parable of the Steward of unrighteousness.—If they were despised and derided by the Pharisees, let us, who profess ourselves his Disciples, accept them with greater reverence, and apply them to a better use.

To improve the doctrine which is here conveyed let me first offer some reflexions on that assertion of our Lord; *For the Children of this world are wiser in their generation than the Children of light.*

If we compare the situations of these two characters of men, we shall see the ground on which this assertion rests. The Children of the world are stationed in that world to which they are attached. The goods of the world are con-

SERM. XI. tinually sensible and present to them; so that they can comprehend them with a nearer view, and retain them with a surer hold. The Children of light are stationed at a distance from the realms of light, and the happiness of those regions is invisible and remote as well in time as in place; so that it frequently must evade their thoughts, and can have but a faint and imperfect impression on their hearts.

The Children of the world find the present life adapted both to their desires and capacities. Their attention is fixed on this alone, and they pursue it without interruption or impediment from any other object. The Children of light are embarrassed by the double claims of the present and the future life. For though they look to things not seen and eternal, yet they are in the midst of things visible and temporal: and though they aspire after the beatitudes of heaven, yet are they assaulted by those too perceptible cares and pleasures of the world, which have so firm a hold on the affections and so great an influence on the conduct of men. When these things are considered, we need not be surprized at our Lord's remark,

remark, that the Children of this world are wiser in their generation than the Children of light. SERM. XI.

But though they are wiser in their generation, they are by no means wiser for the whole of their existence. Their wisdom, like the Mammon on which it is employed, is deceitful and transitory. And when they leave their generation, and come into eternity, they will find to their cost, that *the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God*[b]. Wise to the present life, they know exactly to appreciate worldly things according to their value: but unwise to the whole extent of their being, they have not learnt to make a proper estimate between things temporal and things eternal; between that unrighteous Mammon, that frail and transitory wealth, on which they set their affections, and the genuine and substantial riches of the world to come; between that substance, which is lent for a season, and that, which is given for all eternity.

That the Children of light may ensure their title to this high character on earth and all its blessed immunities in

[b] 1 Cor. iii. 19.

SERM. XI. heaven, they may derive a lesson of instruction even from the Children of the world.

If the Children of this world have the object of their wisdom continually before their eyes and within their reach; let the Children of light assiduously labour to anticipate the life of light, and present it as much as they are able to their faculties of perception; let them walk by faith, as if they walked by sight, as if the mighty recompence of another life were present to their eyes, and within the attainment of an industrious endeavour.

If the Children of this world are accustomed to fix their attention on one end alone, the generation in which they live, and pursue it without interruption or impediment from any other object; let the Children of light also learn to fix their attention on one end alone; but let that be the great and important end of man, the future generation to which they would belong, and pursue it, as far as their present capacities and station will allow, without interruption or incumbrance from the objects of the world.

By

By such an application of their hearts and lives they will not be embarrassed with the claims of two Masters of such opposite characters as God and Mammon: but accepting Mammon as their Servant, and not as their Master, they will give to God the full measure of their obedience; being always animated by this assurance, that God is not unrighteous to forget their service, but that in due season he will advance them to the promised recompence, and will give them the inheritance assigned for the Children of light. SERM. XI.

While men are in the world, the world will have some claim upon the attention of all, even of those who are the Children of light. It is no part of wisdom to neglect our worldly comforts, or to forego those benefits which the Father of mercies has placed within our reach; provided they do not engross our affections to the disparagement of superior goods. But whenever the demands of the present and the future life are not to be reconciled, whenever there arises a competition of service between God and Mammon, it is then the truest wisdom to prefer that interest, which is most durable and substantial, and to

SERM. XI.

attach ourselves to that Master, who can yield the greatest recompence.

If then we are convinced, that the goods of this world are transitory and delusive, and that the goods of another world are durable and eternal; that the reign of Mammon is only for a time, and that God is King for ever and ever; it is certainly our truest wisdom, whatever be the result of things for a season, to pay our service to God and not to Mammon, and to forego the goods of this life in order to secure our final welfare in the world to come.

Thus may we draw a lesson of wisdom even from the Children of this world in obtaining for ourselves a name among the Children of light. And thus according to that precept of our Lord, on which I have now to speak, we may *make to ourselves Friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness; that when we fail, they may receive us into everlasting habitations.*

As the Lord in the parable had committed his goods to a Steward; so God has committed to mankind their several talents, not to be wasted, but employed to good account in the service of God and to the benefit of

of men; having given them an assurance in his holy word, that a time will arrive, when they shall be called to surrender up their trust, and to give an account of their Stewardship. SERM. XI.

But though these riches are the gift of a good and righteous God, and were given to men for the best and most beneficial purposes, yet in too many respects they deserve to be stiled the Mammon of unrighteousness. For not to mention their unrighteous tendency in detaching us too much from seeking the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, they do not procure us all the desireable things which they promise, and they fail us when we put our confidence in them. They supply us indeed with food and raiment and lodging, and they furnish us liberally with many comforts and conveniences, which are generally prized in the estimation of the world. But *the life of man consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth*[c]. And there are many essentials of human happiness, which all the riches of this world are not competent to bestow. For will they preserve or restore either

[c] Luke xii. 15.

health

SERM. XI. health to the body, or peace to the mind? Will they soothe our afflictions for the loss of those we esteem and love? Or will they say to a troubled conscience, Peace! be still? In all these respects they are miserably deficient; and though they offer every thing that is desireable in life, yet they delude us with promises which they can never verify.

Again, Admitting that they procure us many worldly comforts, their value sinks on the reflexion that their tenure is fugitive and precarious. They may be destroyed by flood and fire; they may be taken from us by fraud or violence: moth and rust may corrupt; and thieves may break through and steal [d]. And even should they continue with us through life, yet they will necessarily fail us in death. For as we brought nothing into this world, so we can carry nothing out [e]. We shall have nothing to bear into another world, but the account of our conduct and the application of the gifts of God in this.

But though our worldly wealth deserves in so many respects to be stiled

[d] Matt. vi. 19. [e] 1 Tim. vi. 7.

the

the Mammon of unrighteousness, yet we may apply it to a righteous end; though fugitive and precarious in itself, yet we may render it instrumental to our durable and unalienable good. And would we learn in what manner to apply it to so wise and beneficial an end, we are instructed by a Teacher of consummate wisdom, that we make to ourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness. SERM. XI.

To make to themselves friends is a piece of advice, which the Children of this world seem very well disposed to take: and they account themselves wise in their generation in laying out their Mammon in so promising a bargain. They sacrifice a portion of their wealth in conciliating friends; and they hope to have the obligation recompensed another time with abundant interest. Thus the Steward undertook to conciliate the Debtors of his Lord, by abridging their several debts and stating them to be less than they truly owed. Supposing them to be the Children of this world like himself, he trusted no doubt, that such an obligation would secure them for his friends, to whom he might resort on a reverse of fortune.

Yet

SERM. XI. Yet notwithstanding all his art he might be disappointed in his sinister policy, he might be overreached in worldly wisdom even by those on whom he trusted. For after he had taught them to violate a principle of justice, he had little hold upon them by a principle of honour. Uprightness of conduct is the common link of union in society. And therefore notwithstanding their indifference to all other moral obligations, the Children of the world agree for their common interest to put a brand upon all dishonest dealing. So that it may be questioned, whether a man can be truly wise in his generation who is not honest in his conversation with the world.

But putting out of the question all fraudulent acts or schemes of advancing their temporal interest, let us regard the Children of the world in their customary policy of laying out their wealth in conciliating Friends. But what are those Friends, whom they spare no cost to gain? Even supposing them to be the favourites of fortune and the dispensers of every worldly good, yet are they always ready to repay the purchase of their friend-

friendship? Or allowing that they answer the most extravagant expectations of their worldly suitors, their interest in life is precarious, and themselves are mortal. In this respect they closely resemble that unrighteous Mammon which procured their friendship. Nor will they at all avail in the essentials of human happiness. They will neither protract nor blunt the stroke of death, nor forward our important interest in the world to come. SERM. XI.

It is therefore our truest wisdom to conciliate other Friends; such Friends, as can provide us more permanent and substantial goods, as on our failure in this transitory life may receive us into everlasting habitations.

Such Friends we may look for in the blessed Angels, whose welcome office it is, while we remain on earth, to minister to us in the ways of salvation; and when their race on earth is closed, to convey the righteous to their appointed mansions in the realms of happiness. And such a Friend above all other Beings we may find in God, the Author of every good and perfect gift, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow

SERM. XI. shadow of turning[f]; who, when all other Friends forsake or fail them, will still continue true to those that diligently seek him; who, when their worldly wealth is fled or wrested from them, can supply them with a treasure which they cannot lose, and when they are ejected from this tabernacle of the body, can provide them a home eternal in the heavens.

But what means are we to use to conciliate so great a Friend? Even as the Gospel teaches, by conforming to his image and complying with his will. In order to propitiate his favour, we must endeavour to be like him. And as it is so difficult to look up to the virtues of a Spiritual Being, he hath condescended to manifest himself to the world in the person of Jesus Christ; who, though the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person[g], hath graciously vouchsafed to take our nature upon him, and to shew us an example of heavenly virtue in a human form.

But to limit our attention to the object of the text, we are to render

[f] James i. 17. [g] Heb. i. 3.

God

God our Friend by the Mammon of unrighteousness, or in other words by the application of our worldly wealth. For though distinguished by so questionable a name, yet if we apply it to a righteous use we shall make the God of righteousness our friend. SERM. XI.

The first disposal of our riches is in honest and equitable dealing to mankind. It is not to be imagined, that the application of our mammon can be acceptable to the Lord, if it be tarnished with injustice. The Steward in this narrative might suppose, that he was wise in his generation in making to himself friends at the expence of another man. But the Friend whom we have to seek, will account all offerings evil, unless they are presented with clean or honest hands. He will not be pleased with us nor accept our persons, unless we adhere to that golden rule in our dealings with our fellow creatures, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*[h].

In performing this obligation of moral duty we have one certain way before us,

[h] Matt. vii. 12.

in

SERM. XI. in which we must not deviate either to the right hand or to the left. But we have a more extensive range of action in the exercise of our charity. This is an essential consideration in the disposition of our worldly wealth. If we would secure an interest in a divine Friend, we must be bountiful to our fellow-creatures, as he is bountiful to us. And would we know the various means of practising this virtue, the Prophet has taught us in a very little compass, *That thou deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house; when thou seest the naked, that thou clothe him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh*[1]. And in order to induce us to such an application, it behoves us to bear in mind, that the wealth in our possession is not so much a gift, as a trust committed to our stewardship; and that at a future day an inquiry will be made by our Lord, whether we have wasted his goods in vicious and unprofitable pursuits, or whether we have employed them according to his will to righteous ends, in promoting his service and in

[1] Isa. lviii. 7.

im-

improving the welfare of our fellow-creatures. SERM. XI.

By such an application of our worldly wealth we shall make to ourselves an omnipotent and immutable Friend in Heaven, who will never leave us nor forsake us. And surely this is the greatest blessing that man can possibly attain. Assured of such a Friend we need not fear whatever may befal us. In all the changes and chances of this mortal life we may freely commit ourselves to the protection and providence of that Being, who neither slumbers nor sleeps; being fully satisfied, that though he may suffer us to be afflicted for a time, yet he designs this affliction for our genuine and our final good; to humble or to prove us, to correct our infirmities, to purify our hearts, and thus prepare and qualify us for a place among the Children of light. Even in the last trials of mortality, when our temporal riches fail us, and our mortal Friends can yield us no relief, we shall have a peace, which the world cannot give [k], that peace of God which passeth all understanding [l]: and in the end of

[k] John xiv. 27. [l] Phil. iv. 7.

SERM. XI. all things, when we shall be called to give an account of our Stewardship, our Lord will commend us for having acted with true wisdom; and not only commend us, but also most abundantly reward. Having been found faithful in the unrighteous Mammon, we shall be entrusted with the true riches, the treasures of the heavenly Kingdom; and having been faithful in the riches, which are lent us for a season, we shall be recompensed with those heavenly riches, which shall be eternally and unalienably our own.

SERMON

SERMON XII.

THE RICH MAN AND THE POOR MAN.

LUKE XVI. 19, 20, 21.

There was a certain Rich Man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain Beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the Rich Man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

IN the former part of this Chapter our Lord had been instructing his Disciples both by parable and precept in the wisest disposal of their worldly wealth, and in the best application of their services in life. Their wealth he taught them was to be employed in making to themselves a Friend, who upon their failure might receive them

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into everlasting habitations: and their services were to be devoted to that Master, who could most abundantly recompense their labours. It is recorded on this occasion, that *the Pharisees who were covetous heard all these things, and they derided him.* Though assuming to themselves the character of being righteous, yet they gave their friendship to the Mammon of unrighteousness: though affecting an exclusive zeal for the service of God, yet they strove to divide their services between God and Mammon. Hereupon they treated with derision doctrines, which were too much at variance with their own dispositions and sentiments. Perceiving his instructions to be thus despised, he addressed them in a tone of more direct reproof; *Ye are they who justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts. For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.* Though they bore a show of righteousness, which imposed upon mankind, yet their secret thoughts were known to God, who accurately notices every movement of the mind, and accounts many things odious which are applauded by the world.

In

In the sequel of the same discourse he delivers the ensuing parable. SERM. XII.

There was a certain Rich Man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain Beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the Rich Man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

We are here presented with a brief but expressive image of human life in the remote extremes of prosperity and affliction. The one is supplied with every luxury that can minister to his pleasures: and the other is destitute of the common comforts and necessaries of life. Thus the Rich man has his good things, and the Poor man his evil things. And should we look no farther than the present scene of life, we might suppose the Rich man to have been eminently happy, and the Poor man to have been of all men most miserable.

But if we would make a due estimation of their several lots in the scale of happiness and misery, we must take into our view the whole compass of their existence. Now the parable not only represents their fortunes in life,

SERM. XII. but also opens to our sight their destinies after death. Whatever might be their respective enjoyments or sufferings in the present state, they were equally subject to the sentence of mortality, though there might be some difference in the external circumstances of their departure. *It came to pass that the Beggar died*;—No notice was taken of his decease, and no attention was paid to his remains. *The Rich man also died—and was buried:* his death was publicly recorded, and sumptuous obsequies consigned him to the tomb. Very different was the reception of their souls in another world. *The Poor man was conveyed by Angels into Abraham's bosom: While in hell the Rich man lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom.*

In this dreadful state he sought some mitigation of torment from his great Progenitor Abraham, whom he saw at a distance in the highest eminence of bliss; nor did he scruple to ask it through the ministry of that very Beggar, who had formerly lain at his gate in pain and hunger and disregard, but was now advanced to a distinguished place in the mansions of happines: *Father Abraham,*

ham, have mercy on me; and send Lazarus, SERM.
that he may dip the tip of his finger in XII.
water and cool my tongue, for I am tor-
mented in this flame. But Abraham said, *Son, remember, that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus his evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.*

Thus finding the door of mercy for ever shut against himself, the unhappy soul petitions for the charitable service of Lazarus in behalf of his Brethren, who were going on in the same way of destruction, but were yet in a capacity to retrieve their errors by repentance: *I pray thee therefore, Father, that thou wouldst send him to my Father's house, for I have five Brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come to this place of torment.* In answer to this petition the Patriarch alleges that they possessed every reasonable means of salvation: *They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.* The unhappy Spirit perseveres in his suit, on a presumption

SERM. XII. that so striking a miracle would alarm them into reflexion: *Nay, Father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* To which the Patriarch finally replies, *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

If such is the condition of the spiritual world, if the gates of acceptance are thus freely expanded to the Poor, if it be so difficult for a Rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, who among us would be so solicitous to obtain or increase his wealth, as to rise up early and late take rest and eat the bread of carefulness and toil, as to compass sea and land in search of this imaginary good, when the object of his persevering diligence is of so dangerous a tenure? Who would not rather chuse the rags and the sores, the squalid misery and want of the poor man, than the sumptuous fare and splendid vesture of the rich? Who would not willingly surrender every good in life, if in another state it must be exchanged for torment? Who would not cheerfully submit to every evil, if the

the recompence in another state is eternal happiness? SERM. XII.

But let us be cautious of inferring from these words any doctrine, which is repugnant to our ideas of the divine justice and benevolence. The impartial goodness of God is abundantly displayed both in the work of nature and in the word of grace. Though his providence in the visible world may seem to be more favourable to the rich, yet his sun enlivens and his rain refreshes all: and though in the spiritual world he may shew a superior indulgence to the poor, yet he does not grant them an exclusive title to his favour; for the scripture speaks of many rich men, as favourites of God and heirs of his inheritance; while it further states their riches in the light of blessings, because they sanctified their use by pious and charitable applications.

I need only bring the example of Abraham himself, the very chief among the blessed. The sacred history informs us that *he was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold*[1]. But then he shewed his his gratitude to the Giver by the use of

[1] Gen. xiii. 2.

his

SERM. XII.

his abundance. Wherever he went he built an altar to the Lord who had favoured him so much, and offered thereupon the choice of his flocks and herds. Wherever he sojourned, he was always ready to redress the wrongs of the injured, and to relieve the wants of the poor. The door of his tent was always open to the stranger and the way faring man, and he sought occasions of exercising the rites of hospitality. In such acts of piety and benevolence his riches were indeed a blessing. They procured him the reverence of men: they made him worthy to be *called the Friend of God* [b]. He was blest in his abundance here. And in the world of Spirits, according to the picture of this parable, he took the highest place in the regions of happiness.

It may therefore be readily assumed, that the final destinies of the Rich and the Poor man were not determined in another state by the qualities of those different portions which they had received upon earth, but by the improvement or abuse which they had severally made of their respective portions. For

[b] James ii. 23.

though

though the parable does not expressly state the characters of the Rich and the Poor man, yet their conduct in life must be understood from the nature of their recompence after death. When therefore we find the Rich man tormented, it is to be inferred that he had viciously enjoyed his good things in life; and when we find the Poor man comforted, it is also to be inferred that he had virtuously sustained his evil things. SERM. XII.

We are not however to suppose, that the Rich man had been flagrantly criminal, that he had perverted his means of doing good into instruments of tyranny and oppression, or that he had spared no measures however violent or lawless to gratify his passions, whether of lust, ambition, or revenge. For if our Lord had intended such a character, he most probably would have expressed it in the narrative. Without suspecting him to have been positively criminal, it is enough to suppose that he had been unprofitable. And so much is implied in the short account that is given of him in life, that he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day; as if his whole attention was confined to the decoration

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coration of his person and the gratification of his appetite. Something also may be inferred from his treatment of the Beggar that lay at his gate. We have no ground for supposing that he had purposely withholden his benevolence from him, much less that he had treated him with cruelty and insult. He did not spurn him from his gate; he did not forbid him the fragments of his plenteous board: but he was utterly indifferent to his griefs; and though a word from him would have been a solace to his sorrows and a relief to his want, yet he would not exercise his charity to so very slight a degree in behalf of a distressed fellow-creature.

It seems he acknowledged Abraham for his Father; and probably might boast of his descent from so illustrious a Patriarch. But he had not copied those virtues of piety to God and benevolence to man, which had given his great Ancestor such pre-eminence of character both in heaven and in earth. It seems he believed in Moses and the Prophets: but he was not persuaded by them. If he heard them with his ears, he did not regard them in his practice. Seduced by the voice of

pleasure he forgot the claims of duty. SERM. No sacrifice of prayer was offered in his XII. courts: no incense of thanksgiving ascended from his dwellings. The blessings of the poor pursued him not in life: the mournings of the needy did not follow him in death. Intent on no other purpose but to indulge his ease and gratify his passions he neither feared God, nor regarded man.—Was this a suitable behaviour for a man who believed in another life, when he should be called to give an account of his works? What works could he have to shew to the Lord in return for all his benefits?—Inconsiderate man! he had provided no return, and therefore he was consigned to torment.

And as the Rich man had misemployed his abundance, so the Poor man we may also understand had improved his want. Confiding in the care of Providence he never charged God foolishly. He complied with his laws, whether the service were pleasing or painful. He submitted to his disposal, whether for comfort or affliction. If comfort came, he was thankful for the favour; and if affliction came, he was resigned to his will. By such a course of conduct he mitigated

SERM. XII. mitigated the sufferings of the present state of being; and when he was called out of this life, he was prepared and qualified for the comforts of the life to come.

LET me here make one observation on the peculiar structure and complexion of this parable. It was the general usage of our holy Teacher to draw his allusions and similitudes from familiar scenes of nature and of common life. But here he opens to us the invisible world, and gives us some shadowy picture of the regions beyond the grave. It is not however necessary to suppose, that he gave these images for a literal representation of the world of spirits. For as he condescended to address his discourse to the observation and experience of his hearers, so he also did not scruple to conform his language to their popular traditions and opinions. Now it is to be understood that he has borrowed the images of this parable from the vulgar notions of the Jews respecting the disposal of departed souls: or rather, if we follow the researches of some learned Examiners, he has adopted

adopted the whole parable from the legends or traditions of the Rabbis and the Pharisees. Now the notions, which the Jews entertained of Hell, or as it here signifies, of the Invisible World, were drawn by a natural train of thought from their places of public sepulture, which consisted of large subterraneous caverns hewn in the rock, with cells all around to receive the bodies of the deceased. It was hence that Isaiah drew such an animated image in that triumphal song, which he puts into the mouth of his delivered Countrymen on the fall of their proud oppressor the King of Babylon: *Hell from beneath is moved to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth: it hath raised from their thrones all the kings of the nations*[c].

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The imagery of this parable is of a similar kind. The region of departed souls is described as a vast tract of country, distinguished by a broad and unpassable gulf into the departments of happiness and misery. On the one side is a feast of joy provided for the righteous, wherein the uppermost seats are

[c] Isa. xiv. 9.

SERM. XII. assigned to the Patriarchs: hence the frequent image in the gospel of sitting down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God. On the other side is a region of extreme anguish and sorrow prepared for the wicked, of which the popular idea was derived from the vale of Hinnom or Gehennah, the place of punishment by fire for such Criminals, as had incurred that heaviest sentence of the Mosaic law.

Now in taking these images of the parable, if not the parable itself, from the traditionary doctrines of the Pharisees, our Saviour seems to design a more especial reference to the Pharisees, to whom he was now addressing his discourse. And what could be a wiser or more equitable method of discoursing to such as professed themselves to be teachers of religious truth, than to improve that lesson, which they gave to others, into an argument of admonition to themselves?

The gospel frequently touches on the character of the Pharisees. Though boasting to themselves that they had Abraham for their Father, they were not anxious to shew themselves the Children

Children of Abraham by a resemblance of disposition and character. The sacrifices, which he had resolutely made, at the call of God and for the sake of righteousness, of country, kindred, and of native home, they might indeed applaud, but they were not solicitous to imitate. Attached to the world and all those good things which the world supplies, they rarely turned their thoughts, they never fixed their hearts on that better country, which God had shewn to Abraham at a distance as the great and final object of every true Believer. And though they professed their belief in Moses and the Prophets, and made their boast of knowing and understanding them, though they admitted for an established truth, what Moses had obscurely signified, and the Prophets had more clearly taught, the retribution of another life, yet they neglected to regard this doctrine in their practice. To them therefore the parable applied as a warning, that they should immediately consider their ways, and repair their errors, while there was place and season for repentance; that so they might avert the fatal consequence, which is here so feelingly described, of living to themselves

SERM. XII. selves alone, and neglecting the duties which they owed both to God and man.

And as it was a warning to the Pharisees, so also was it an encouragement to the Disciples. If they did not then experience the extremes of poverty and anguish like Lazarus, they were to be called in the course of their ministry to encounter greater evils than those of Lazarus, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness[d]. But though they had their evil things for a season, they were assured of better things in store, if they patiently and resolutely persevered in their appointed course of life. And though in the present world they should be destitute, afflicted, and even tormented, yet in the world of Spirits they should be abundantly comforted; for they should be received of Angels their fellow-servants in the work of the Lord, and placed among the Patriarchs in the kingdom of their Father. As they had been pre-eminent in sacrifice and service, so also should they be pre-

[d] 2 Cor. xi. 27.

eminent

eminent in glory. They should sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel[c]. SERM. XII.

AFTER thus explaining the parable in its primary design as bearing a reference to our Saviour's auditors, I proceed to apply it in a general view, as an argument of doctrine, and as a lesson of instruction to the Christian world.

AND first, as an argument of doctrine; it contributes to dispel any doubts that we might entertain of an equitable and impartial Providence, when we review those inequalities of fortune which subsist among mankind. To a superficial regard a state of affluence may appear a mark of God's favour and a state of indigence a token of his displeasure. To correct so erroneous a thought the parable instructs us, not to judge of the condition of man by the present life alone, but to take into the account the whole compass of his existence both in this and the future life. We have here an account of two men in the opposite extremes of temporal

[c] Matt. xix. 28.

SERM. XII. fortune, whose destinies are totally reversed in the spiritual world: for he that had his good things is consigned to torment, and he that had his evil things is advanced to happiness.

But here again there is need of caution that we do not fall into an opposite error of greater magnitude, that a man, who is gifted with abundance, is on that account in less favour with God, and that a man, who is placed in indigence, is on that account in greater favour. For sufficient assurance is given us in the gospel, that God appreciates the different characters of men, and will award them their respective destinies hereafter, not according to their present lot in life, whether prosperous or adverse, but according to the application of their present lot, whether beneficial or unprofitable.

If the scriptures occasionally speak of riches with suspicion and of poverty with complacence, the reason most probably is, because in the natural tendency of things riches are more liable to abuse and poverty is more susceptible of improvement. As far as a state of affluence attaches men too closely to the concerns of this world, it may be regarded as detrimental, because it

weans them from the necessary care of their eternal interest: and as far as a state of indigence detaches their affections from the things of earth, it is beneficial, because it directs their endeavours to their final and eternal weal. SERM. XII.

And this we may presume is the reason, why our Lord ascribes a blessing to the poor and a woe to the rich. The poor, being disengaged from worldly wealth, were more disposed for the reception of his doctrines, and were consequently better qualified for the attainment of his beatitudes. And the rich, being entangled with the cares of worldly wealth, were less inclined to attend to his instructions, and were consequently less deserving of his proposed rewards.

But though the scriptures occasionally speak of riches in the language of suspicion, yet they also teach us that riches and all other temporal possessions are imparted unto men in the light of benefits: and while they are subservient to their present comfort, they may be also made conducive to their final happiness; provided they are not abused in vicious or squandered in unprofitable pursuits, but according to the design

SERM. XII. of Providence are hallowed to the service of God and the benefit of men. If they so improve their abundance, it will become a blessing to them even beyond this life; and though they have their good things now, they will also have exceeding better things hereafter.

In like manner the scriptures also teach us, that a state of indigence or adversity is the dispensation of a wise and gracious God, who has ordained or permitted it even in mercy to mankind, for the purpose of correcting their errors, of enlarging their virtues, and of setting their affections on a better and a happier state. If they so improve their indigence, it will also become a blessing to them in another life; and though they now have their evil things for a season, they will hereafter have their good things to all eternity.

Thus whenever we are perplexed in beholding those inequalities of fortune which Providence has appointed in the world, we see where to resort for a solution of every difficulty. The light of the gospel dispels every doubt by placing in our view the whole compass of our existence. Though the condition of the rich and the poor be apparently very different

different in this life, yet in these essentials they are on a level, that they are equally placed in a state of probation, in which they are accountable for the application of their several talents, whether many or few. In another world the rich and the poor will indifferently meet together; all distinctions of this life will be for ever set aside: but the account of their works will follow them beyond the grave; and according as they have improved or wasted that portion of talents which has been assigned for their charge, they shall be distinguished in their sentence to happiness or to misery. On this contemplation of the business and the end of man the good and the evil things of this life become of small comparative regard in themselves; and every man who studies his most important interest, instead of anxiously sighing for the abundance of the rich, or fearfully shrinking from the indigence of the poor, must employ his chief solicitude to escape the torments, and to secure the comforts, of the world to come. SERM. XII.

THUS the parable supplies an instructive lesson both to Rich

SERM. XII. and Poor.—To the Rich it affords a most solemn admonition that they make a good and proper use of their abundance. The picture which is here displayed of a man highly fortunate in life, yet consigned to torment after death, is an exemplary warning to all in similar conditions, that they be diligent to avoid his conduct, as they are anxious to escape his doom. It was the earnest admonition of our Lord, advantageous indeed to all, but most appropriate to those who had large possessions, or a superior portion of a temporal inheritance; *Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth* [f]. The spirit of which is to guard us all from setting our affections too intently, not on the possessions only, but also on the occupations and amusements of this life. And the reason is, that the great end of man is not to amass or to enjoy his abundance here on earth, but to provide for his spiritual welfare in another world.

To impress this admonition with the more effect, it behoves them seriously

[f] Luke xii. 15.

to

to regard that principle of divine justice so frequently repeated in the gospel, that *where much has been given, much also will be required.* It is by no means sufficient for their acceptance at the tribunal of divine grace, that they have not acquired their abundance by dishonest or sinister means, and that they do not apply it to unrighteous purposes and ends. As they have larger means of doing good in their generation, there is a greater demand upon them for an active and expansive service. Nor must they lull their conscience into security, and suppose themselves absolved from claims of beneficial service, because they do not meet with opportunities of doing pious and charitable actions. They must come forward and exert themselves in seeking and discovering objects, on whom they may confer a portion of those benefits, which Providence has given them the means of distributing. Nor can there be a want of objects in the world, while the world continues what it is, while there is evil to be corrected and good to be improved. If they thus conform themselves to the will and the character of God by being rich in good works, ready to distribute

and

SERM. XII. and willing to communicate, they lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life [s].

And while the parable supplies a caution to the Rich, that they make a proper use of their abundance, it also yields an admonition to the Poor, that they make a religious improvement even of their want. It is not for them to say, because they are embarrassed in fortune and distressed for the necessaries of life, that therefore God requires no service at their hands; much less would it become them to repine at his Providence and to say, Why hast thou made us so? While higher and more active claims are incumbent upon the rich, it is the more passive and humbler charge of the poor to conform their minds to the lowliness of their condition, to apply themselves with diligence to the duties of that station in which they are placed, to keep a due command over their passions, more especially those of envy and discontent, to be careful over their household, that they may be provided with their daily bread for the sustenance

[s] 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.

not

not only of the body but also of the soul, to be honest and peaceable and affectionately intreated towards their neighbours, and dutiful, pious, and resigned to God. SERM. XII.

Being thus conformed in their dispositions and demeanour to the will of God, they shall have a peace on earth which the world cannot give. And should Providence for any wise and righteous ends, whether of correction or of trial, permit impediments to rise in the way of their honest industry, and not allow their diligence to prosper; even though they should be reduced to the same extremities of distress with Lazarus; yet while they have this peace of God within their breasts, they shall be happier than their proud and wealthy Neighbour, who possesses and enjoys the whole desire of his heart, but unhappily for himself, though he does not know his indigence, is in spiritual want, and is not rich toward God. In the multitude of the sorrows which they have in the body the comforts of divine grace will refresh and exhilarate their souls. And when they rest from their labours and sorrows in death, those blessed Angels, who watched round their dwellings, who sup-

SERM. XII. supported them in trials, and ministered unto them in the work of salvation, are prepared to carry them to those dwellings of eternal peace, where *God himself shall be for ever with them: and he shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away*[h]. When as soon as they arrive at this transcending scene, they shall put on a body of incorruption, shall be invested with the garments of the children of light, and being admitted into the full assembly of glorified spirits shall sit down with Abraham, or rather let a Christian say, with Christ, and shall partake of the fruit of that tree of life, which is for the healing of the nations[i].

Such is the improvement that may be drawn from the parable. Whatever be our lot in life, whether prosperous or adverse, whether good or evil, if we improve it, we shall reap incomparably greater good, and if we abuse it, we shall reap incomparably greater evil.

[h] Rev. xxi. 4. [i] Rev. xxii. 2.

BUT

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But the things of this life are near and before our eyes, while the things of another life are at a distance and out of our view. And therefore men are so much engrossed with things temporal, and so little sedulous after things eternal. To counterbalance this inconvenience we are frequently and solemnly instructed by the word of truth, that the goods and evils of the present life, however we may rate them in our worldly imaginations, admit of no comparison, for they bear no proportion either in measure or duration, with the goods and evils of the life to come. Of the nature of future happiness or misery perhaps it is not possible to form a due conception in the body. So that every thing respecting the future world is of necessity conveyed to us under the form of similitude or parable. But though the scriptures do not fully instruct us in the nature of these rewards and punishments, they shew them to be transcendent. Thus the excellence of future happiness is expressively described by the image here displayed of the poor man placed in the bosom of Abraham: and again the intenseness of future misery is with equal expression repre-

SERM. XII. represented in that passionate exclamation of the suffering sinner, *I am tormented in this flame.* Though these images give us no distinct idea of the nature of future happiness and misery, yet they teach us to judge sufficiently of the degree; for whatever we enjoy or endure upon earth is not to be put in competition with the enjoyments or sufferings of another world.

And as they are transcendent, so also are they irreversible. The present life alone is the state of discipline or trial, as the future is the state of recompence. While the day of life remains, it is possible for the righteous to fall away from their own stedfastness, it is possible for the wicked to retrieve their errors by repentance. But when once the door of life is closed, as the tenour of their life is unchangeable, so the consequence of their deeds is unalterable. As the tree falleth so it will lie: as the doom of men is then determined, so will it remain for ever. A dread separation will then take place between the righteous and the wicked. A great gulf which it shall not be possible to pass will be placed between the regions of happiness and misery. The righteous will

will then be raised above the possibility of a relapse: the wicked will be depressed beyond the compass of repentance. The good then enjoyed will suffer no impair: the evil then endured will admit of no abatement. SERM. XII.

For this important doctrine there is no want of evidence. It was signified to the Jews by Moses and the Prophets. And though not expressed in full and decisive terms, it was accepted by the great body of the Jews as an article of faith. But whatever doubt there might hang upon it under the law, it was put beyond the reach of controversy by the Author and Finisher of our faith, who has expressly told us that *the hour is coming, when all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation* [k].

To the truth of this doctrine he has set his seal by sundry visions and miracles, which were sensibly displayed and visibly performed. A voice from heaven repeatedly declared him to be the beloved Son of God. His word alone

[k] John v. 28, 29.

was

SERM. XII. was instantaneous healing to the maladies of human nature. And after he had submitted to the death of the cross and had entered into the invisible world, to add a more decisive and more appropriate evidence to this great article of his religion, he rose again from the dead. Thus, as the Apostle says in his epistle to the Romans, *he was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead*[l]. And to the same effect the same Apostle reasons in his preaching to the Athenians, when he declares, that *God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead*[m]. Thus we have not only Moses and the Prophets in common with the Jews; we have a surer word of testimony in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who by rising from the dead himself is become an infallible pledge and earnest that we also shall be raised.

Yet all this weight of evidence is not sufficient to persuade mankind. I do

[l] Rom. i. 4. [m] Acts xvii. 31.

not

not here consider such, as have totally discarded the testimony of the holy scriptures, as reject the belief of our Lord's resurrection and the consequent assurance which it gives us of our own. I would speak only of those, who are Christians in profession and admit the truth of the gospel revelation. Now it cannot be dissembled, that, in spite of the testimonies which the holy scriptures yield, there are too many Christians in name, who pass their days as if they had no belief in the retribution of another life. And this practical unbelief, it is to be feared, is most prevalent among those, who are more highly favoured with the good things of Providence, and from whom a better return might in gratitude be looked for. Thus the Rich man acknowledged, that he had left five brethren, who were pursuing the same course of life which had been so fatal to himself. And the reason is, that the God of this world, the Mammon of unrighteousness, has so much engrossed their hearts, that though they do not positively disbelieve, yet they cannot bear the truth. They are become so entangled with the cares of life, that the word of God is choked in

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SERM. XII. its growth, so as to bring no fruit to perfection [n].—What more can be done that God has not done, to fix in their hearts a conviction of the powers of the world to come? Do they wait for a Visitant from the other world to give them a more impressive warning of the opposite destinies of the righteous and the wicked? After God hath wrought such a series of miracles in testimony of this great truth what sinner can presume to look for a special miracle in his favour? And even were it granted to his unreasonable desire, what ground is there to imagine, that this would have effect, where the general testimonies of God have already failed?

What is here supposed in a parable was verified in real history. A greater than Moses and the Prophets appeared among the Jews with visions of grace and with miracles of mercy; yet they heard him not: he rose from the dead; yet they were not persuaded; they still rejected his testimony, and paid no credence to his word. What the Jews altogether denied we believe, or however we profess to believe, that the Son of

[n] Luke viii. 14.

God

God descended from heaven to instruct and to save the world, that he *was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification* [o]. But to what purpose do we honour him with our lips, if our heart is far from him [p]; to what purpose do we confess him with our tongues, if we deny him in our practice? If we persevere in sin in defiance of the words and the works, the sufferings and the triumphs of this divine Visitant in human form, we have no room to look for any other Visitant from the spiritual world, to warn us of our danger and to stop us in our guilty course. If he that despised Moses and the Prophets died without mercy, what sorer punishment may not we incur, if we do despite to the Spirit of divine grace [q], if we contemptuously disregard the sacrifice of the Son of God, if we will not be persuaded, though he is risen from the dead?

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[o] Rom. iv. 25. [p] Mat. xv. 8.
[q] Heb. x. 28, 29.

FINIS.

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